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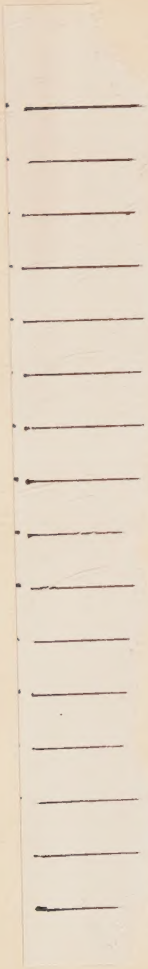

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NADITA
(LITTLE NOTHING)

Books by Grace and Carl Moon

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LOST INDIAN MAGIC
INDIAN LEGENDS IN RHYME
CHI-WEÉ
CHI-WEÉ AND LOKI
NADITA
THE RUNAWAY PAPOOSE
THE MAGIC TRAIL
THE MISSING KATCHINA
THE ARROW OF TEE-MAY
FAR-AWAY DESERT
THE BOOK OF NAH-WEE

YOUNG MODERNS BOOKSHELF

NADITA

(Little Nothing)

BY
GRACE MOON

Illustrated by
Carl Moon

THE SUN DIAL PRESS
NEW YORK

TO
MARY CARYL MOON,
MY OWN LITTLE DAUGHTER,
THIS BOOK IS LOVINGLY DEDICATED.

CL

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CO. SCHOOLS
(MEDIA)

ADVENTURES

Adventures are waiting on every side
For those who have eyes to see,
And we need not travel the oceans wide
To bring them to you and me.
There are lands that are strange and fair and wild,
And many a magic tale,
That only is waiting for any child
Who'll travel the story-book trail!

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

PAGE

Tia, who was big and brown and who never smiled 3

"You are my very own little puppy," Nadita cried in a low voice 11

Three small boys were looking at her curiously 19

Suddenly they all knew that they were hungry 33

Pancho 37

Nadita felt as if she were sitting in a very shaky chair 57

"If we will all look in different places—maybe we will find him," said Pedro 83

Nadita smiled with delight at the great splashing Chico made 91

Chico struck the snake so that it lay still . 115

Miguel, the garden man 149

A little hole led from the cave to outside . . 159

"Oh," she cried, "I feel like dancing!" . . 167

The girl gave a very terrible scream . . . 189

Pancho picked up the end of the chain . . 195

A strange woman watched Nadita with eyes that were narrow and sharp 211

The Padrón 271

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	A Beginning of Adventures	1
II.	New Friends	17
III.	The Road of Kings	35
IV.	The Old Hacienda	49
V.	Poco Is Lost	74
VI.	A Discovery	88
VII.	Where Is Nadita?	104
VIII.	Poco Talks	123
IX.	A Big Plan	137
X.	The Treasure Hunt	152
XI.	The Prize	165
XII.	The Yellow Cat	179
XIII.	The Traveling Carnival	192
XIV.	In Strange Places	208
XV.	The Rescue	228
XVI.	A Tale of Bandits	245
XVII.	The Wonderful Necklace of Fina	259

NADITA
(LITTLE NOTHING)

NADITA

(LITTLE NOTHING)

CHAPTER I

A BEGINNING OF ADVENTURES

From far-away lands the south wind blew,
And brought me a tale that is strange and new;
A tale full of spices and music and flowers,
And many adventures to fill the hours;
And quaint, happy people who live there too—
And
now
I am telling the tale to you!

EVEN before anything had happened, Nadita felt very sure that this day was to be different from other days; there was a sort of tingly feeling inside that told her so, and you shall see how she was right—almost always that tingly feeling was right!

Nadita means "Little Nothing" in Spanish, which is the language they speak in far-away Mexico where

she lives, and it can hardly be called a name at a
but it was what she had always been called, and it w
all the name she had ever known, first, last, or middl
She *was* little, everyone could see that, even for seve
years, and she was very round, from her big blac
eyes to her chubby little toes that liked to wiggle i
the soft warm dust of the roadway—but she was ver
much alive and very far from being truly nothing a
all.

It was Tia who had first called her Nadita; Tia
who was big and brown and who never smiled an
was almost too busy even to talk. And no wonder sh
was busy, for, like the "Old woman who lived in
shoe, she had so many children she didn't know wha
to do," there were five of them in the little room tha
was hardly big enough for two—five, not counting
Nadita, but she was not counted very often, anyway

Nadita could not remember ever having had a
mother, for hers had died when she was very young,
and Tia had taken care of her ever since then—that
is, Tia had let her live in the room with her own
children, but Nadita had always taken care of her
own small self and had learned very early that the
best way to do that was to get out of the way and
stay out of the way all the time it was possible.

Tia, who was big and brown and who never smiled.

They lived on the outside edge of a little town in the middle part of Mexico, a little town whose houses were built of adobe, most of them, and the outside walls were painted pink and blue and yellow to match the gay flowers that grew everywhere they were given a chance to grow. Down in the busy part of town there were grand buildings with arches and big stone pillars, and a cathedral with a high square tower, and a little park (called the Alameda) with walks and benches and a bandstand in it where the band played every Sunday afternoon and often in the evenings through the week too. But out here on the edge of town the buildings were not grand at all, just low walls along the street with green wooden doors that opened into courts and little rooms around the courts, each room a home with its own small family. But big rooms were not needed much, for they were used only to sleep in. Outdoors was the living place, and in the open court each family had its little charcoal stove that served for kitchen, dining room, and gathering place.

Not far down the crooked street whose dust flew up in clouds whenever even a little stiff-legged donkey passed along it, Nadita could see the flashing water of a narrow stream, and almost any morning she

could hear the women laughing and splashing on its banks as they washed the clothes on the flat washing stones. But this day they were not washing. It was market day in the big square near the center of town, and most of the women and many of the men were there.

There were bright-colored umbrellas open in the market-place, and little shelters made of palm leaves, and all the wares were spread out, plainly to be seen. There were fruits and vegetables and meats and live chickens and melons and nuts; and baskets and gay *sarapes* (the bright woven blankets that the men wear on their shoulders), and big straw hats with high peaked crowns, and pottery in all shapes and sizes; and sweetmeats and little cakes, and cheeses and candles and chili peppers and piles of hot *tortillas* (thin cakes made of cornmeal), and pots of steaming stews and beans, and things that smelled so good to the little children who sniffed at them that they fairly squirmed inside with hunger. Nadita wriggled at this thought and looked longingly and hesitatingly toward the market-place, but Tia had sent her on an errand, and that must be attended to before anything else could be thought of at all.

Nadita did not look, even in dress, just like the

other small girls she knew. She loved bright colors and would wind brilliant bits of cotton cloth about her waist or on her head.

"Just like a Spaniard," Tia would say; Tia, who was very proud of the fact that she was Mexican and not Spanish. But Nadita did not mind such words.

"Look, how the sky has pretty colors," she said, "and the flowers, I would like to look like them"; and so, though she had to dress in the clothes Tia gave her—a little faded waist of almost no color usually, and a full-gathered skirt of dark blue cotton, she almost always had a girdle of bright red and a little scarf to wear over her head made of a scrap of bright-colored cloth, and the light in her eyes and the smile on her little round face made everyone think, somehow, of the flowers she loved so well. She was glad, too, that Tia did not have shoes enough to go round, for the scrunchy, soft dust of the roadway felt very pleasant to her bare feet, and she did not like the hard, yellow, squeaky shoes the others had to wear.

This was such a wonderful day—soft and shiny and full of color, like the crumpled bolts of silk stuff in the windows of the *sedería* (silk shop), and Nadita hummed a little tuneless song of pure joy under her

breath as she took the jar Tia had given her and went skipping off to the fountain for water—and the tingly feeling that something was going to happen grew stronger and stronger!

Almost always Nadita was happy inside. It was because ever since she had been a wee baby she had had to look for the happy things her*self*—and she found them—always.

Once Tia had said—and very crossly she had said it!—"Why do you always smile and smile when there is no thing to smile about?"

And Nadita had answered slowly and thoughtfully, "I think—I think it is because, if I *wait* for a smile thing before I smile, it doesn't come, but if I smile *first*—then it always *does* come!"

"You are queer," said Tia, and looked crosser than before, "not one thing like my own little ones"; and when she said it, Nadita had felt that to be "queer" was a very dreadful thing and a thing to be sorry about, and she had gone out and sat on the stone step in front of the house for a long time thinking about it.

But that was a long time ago, and this was to-day —a day when *any*thing might happen—and Nadita stood high on her tip-toes and lifted the jar to the stream from the dripping fountain.

It was such an old fountain. There was a big stone fish with a curly tail, and a fat little stone cupid holding him up, and from his wide mouth poured always, year in and year out, a little splashy, sputtery, sparkly stream that ran into the round stone basin beneath and overflowed and made cool little puddles in the warm dust and ran for a way down the street until it was swallowed up in the thirsty ground. And to this queer little old fountain came everybody in the neighborhood who needed water, and even some whose jars were still full at home, but who loved to hear the splashy song of the water and to feel the cool air that was always here.

What was that queer noise?

Nadita let the water run over the top of her jar and splash down on her bare feet.

It was a very strange noise! And she could not tell where it came from. It was not a cry or a call, but it sounded just a little like both. A very *small* noise with such a sad sound in it—it made Nadita's heart to beat fast.

"It sounds"—she cried under her breath—"it *sounds*——" and then she left her water jar standing in the bowl of the fountain and went searching with an eager face—for the thing that made that sound!

It was the quiet time of the day—a little after the noon hour—when all Mexico forgets the busy things for a while and feels the warm rays of the sun, and listens to the drowsy hum of insects and takes a little nap for an hour or so—the siesta hour, as they call it—and the street was empty of living things. Only Nadita wandered in search of that strange, low sound, and back in the open doorway, Tia waited for water with her hand on her hip, and as she waited a frown grew on her face.

Nadita feared Tia very greatly, for more than once she had felt the weight of that heavy hand in stinging blows on her small brown shoulders, and once the red mark of it had remained for days on her cheek, and Tia had even more cruel ways of punishment than that, for there was a time when she had sent Nadita to her little mat bed with no supper at all, and she remembered yet the hollowness of that long, black night—but now she did not think of Tia—not once! For she had found where the sound came from and it *was* what she had thought!

In a corner of a very dirty old deserted court, there were many boxes and barrels and broken pieces of pottery that had been thrown there—and it was in this place, in a barrel, that she found it—a very small,

You are my very own little puppy." Nadita cried in a low voice.

very dusty, and very miserable-looking little dog! There was not much of him, but Nadita gathered him into her arms with a great eagerness. *Never* had she owned a live pet, and when those brown puppy eyes looked into her own, something very strange happened to Nadita; a warm, new feeling crept into her heart—such a happy feeling—and she hugged the furry little body close.

"You are *my* puppy!" she cried in a low voice, "my very *own* little puppy, and always you shall live with me"; but her thoughts almost stopped then. *Would* the puppy live with her? What would Tia say? "Not ever, not *any* time, have I asked her for one thing," she said almost fiercely. "Surely she will let me keep this one little dog." But there was a great doubt in her heart as she hurried back to the fountain with the puppy held carefully in her arm. He was so small that she could carry him and, with a little extra care, the water jar too, though the water splashed over many times and the jar came near to slipping.

Tia was watching as she came near to the house, and the frown on her face had grown very black.

"What is that thing you have there?" she cried, as she snatched the water jar from Nadita. "And why have you kept me waiting all this day?"

"It is a little dog," answered Nadita in a low voice, "a very *little* dog that I have found."

"Well, throw him away," said Tia. "We will have no dogs here. Throw him away, I say," she cried in a louder voice as Nadita hugged him close. The little pink tongue of the dog licked the small hands that held him, and his brown eyes looked pleadingly up at her as if he understood the words that were spoken.

"Please"—said Nadita, and very much her own eyes looked like those of the little dog—"please—I would like *very* much to keep him."

"You will *not* keep him." The voice of Tia was hard as stone. She had put down the water jar and was standing in the doorway, stiff and stern. "What has put such evil thoughts in your mind to ask that thing—when already I give more food than I can buy? This very minute—while I watch you—you must throw him away—do you hear?" and she stamped her foot.

Nadita did not move—very strangely she felt that she must be some other little girl—not ever had she disobeyed Tia before, but this was a thing she could not help—something was making her do and say things that she could not help, and her eyes grew deep and dark with the wonder of it. Close to her cheek

she held the little forlorn bunch of dog, and she could feel that, like herself, he was trembling—all of him.

Tia came close, and the look in her eyes was not nice to see.

"Is it that you cannot hear to-day?" she asked coldly, and her voice was not so loud now, but Nadita shivered as she heard it.

"Oh, please," she cried again, "do you not see that he loves me?" and she cried it almost in a panic—she could not look now into the eyes of Tia, there was something cruel there that hurt. "Not *ever* has anything loved me," she said, "and this little dog loves me—and there is no one to care for him. He will die if I do not keep him—can you not see that he will die? See how very little he is—and look, you can feel that he is thin. Oh, let me keep just this one little, little dog."

Tia was silent for a moment, but the look in her eyes did not change. Nadita thought maybe she would strike, but she did not strike, there were other thoughts in her mind, and soon almost a smile came to her lips.

"It is very well, then," she said almost calmly. "You and that dog—you go well together. Keep him—keep him always, if you like, but remember this"—

and she paused to make her words more plain—"while you keep him do not come back to this place. Do you understand that? Now, maybe you will learn how I have worked to give food to you—you will work to give it to that dog. Keep him, oh, yes—but *I* do not make a home for a dog. Take him away, and maybe some day you will get some sense again and come back, *maybe* you can come back then, maybe I will let you and maybe not. But go now—you and your dog"; and she laughed a very unpleasant laugh as she stood in the doorway with her hands on her hips.

Nadita looked at her with eyes big and round and frightened, but not once did her arms loosen their hold on their warm little bundle; they felt as if always they had been that way and always would be.

"But where could I go?" she asked then in a voice that trembled just a little.

"Anywhere," answered Tia, with a wide sweep of her arms. "Anywhere at all in all the world, but not in this place"; and she stepped back into the house and closed the door.

CHAPTER II

NEW FRIENDS

The voice of the wind is sweet and low
As it sings to the leaves of the willow tree;
And into my flute I gently blow
The voice of the wind so soft and low—
The voice of the wind as it seems to me
To croon to the leaves of the willow tree!

NADITA looked with fast-beating heart at the closed green door. It had happened so suddenly this thing, just like a cloud that passes over the sun when the sky has been clear and blue. She was hardly sure that it had happened at all. And yet, there was the closed door, and here was the little dog held tight in her arms and a queer, lumpy feeling in her throat. But now she was not frightened, for a very little she had been—it was such a sudden thing—but she was not ever easily frightened, and it was excitement that she felt now. This was a new thing that had happened, and new things did not happen very often. It might even be a pleasant thing to find another home place—for she did not doubt that she

would find one—and perhaps in a new one there would be no Tia who scolded.

There was a scuffle of bare feet in the roadway behind her and Nadita quickly closed her arms more tightly over the warm little bundle in them. The scuffle stopped, and she looked over her shoulder to see what it meant. Three small boys were looking at her curiously. Three boys not much larger than herself.

One of them spoke, and his voice was low and a little breathless.

"We heard her," he said, and his eyes were dark with excitement. "We heard what that woman said. What will you do now?"

He was not asking just to know for himself, Nadita could tell that, and there was in the eyes of all of them an eagerness to help. But before Nadita could answer—and she could not think quickly of any words to answer—the boy spoke again:

"Can we see the little dog? We do not tease girls. My name is Chico—and what is the name of the little dog?"

Nadita's thoughts went round and round, but to her own great surprise she answered the last question very promptly, as if she had always known it.

Three small boys were looking at her curiously.

"His name is Poco," she said, and the boys crowded close to see the little dog. Nadita had always been just a little afraid of boys; she did not know very many of them, only those of Tia, and *they* were not good to her, but she was not afraid of these boys. They were very friendly, and somehow she knew they would not hurt her or the little dog; their eyes were kind and their hands gentle as they touched him.

"That is a nice name," spoke the first boy again. "It is an easy one to remember, like my name. Chico is easy to remember, too, and this other boy's name is Juan and that one is Pedro. You can come and play with us, if you like."

It was plain to see that he was the leader of the three boys, the others listened when he spoke and nodded and smiled, but they did not have much to say at this time. But Juan spoke now, with a look toward the closed door.

"Where will you go?" he asked. "That woman said not to come back," and he waited for Nadita to answer. The others, too, looked at her expectantly, but this was a question she could not answer; not yet had there been time to think about it at all, and she looked down and pushed the warm dust back and

forth with her bare foot for a little while. Poco looked up at her with big eyes, and his little pink tongue touched her wrist.

"Where *do* people go when they haven't a home place?" she asked at last, without looking up, and now the boys did not know what to say. Then Chico spoke:

"This will be a thing we will have to think about," he said seriously, and it made a little warm feeling to come into Nadita's heart to see that he thought of her trouble as his own. "Maybe we will ask someone who knows, or we can plan something—I am very good at planning things. Come, we will go somewhere to talk."

And before she knew what she was doing, Nadita was walking down the street with the three boys and talking with them as if they were very old friends. Somehow she did not fear them at all, and she had no feeling of shyness. They spoke to her as if she were one of themselves, and when she told them all her little story, they were kind and friendly and offered many plans to help her out.

They had walked down the street to the edge of the stream, and now sat, all four, on a big flat rock that ran right out into the water, and the little dog

lay in Nadita's lap and let first one and then the other pat his head.

The boys asked many questions of Nadita, and their eyes opened wide to find how little she knew of the things they knew.

"Hi, Pedro!" cried Chico, in a voice of wonder at one time. "Here is one who does not know about the sails of Guadalupe. I thought everyone in all the world knew that."

Two little pink spots came into the cheeks of Nadita, and she looked down.

"But the world is a very big place," she said a little wistfully. "I cannot know about *all* of it."

"But those sails," he said, looking at her almost unbelievingly, "*every*body knows about those."

"If you will tell *me*," said Nadita with a swift little smile, "then *I* will know, too."

He looked at her for a moment doubtfully, as if considering whether she made fun of him.

"It was a long time ago," he began, "before we, any of us, were born. There was a ship out in the ocean and a great storm. It blew and blew, and there were waves like mountains. They went over the ship and broke it in pieces. The sailors were very good men and prayed to be saved. They prayed to Santa

Maria of Guadalupe and said, if they were saved, they would take the sails of their ships and the mast to Guadalupe and put them up there for a monument so everybody could see. And they *were* saved, and they kept their word and took the sails to Guadalupe and put stone around them so they will last forever."

"Is that a true story?" asked Nadita with round eyes of wonder.

"I myself have been to Guadalupe and I have seen those sails," he said proudly. "So certainly it is true."

"What a great thing it is to be a man," said Nadita, and looked at him with such admiring eyes that Chico grew confused and wriggled and shifted his feet in the dust. "I have not been away to wonderful places like that," continued Nadita. "I have not been away anywhere at all."

"Some day you will go," he said swiftly. "Maybe I, myself, will take you. When I am bigger, I am going everywhere, all over the world. Some places, of course, girls cannot go—pirate places—and where there are lions and animals so big there are not words to tell about them—those places you could not go—only men go there. But other places you would go—I have heard the Padrón tell of them. We shall see, it will not be a great while now—when I am big."

The other two boys had listened breathlessly while Chico talked. Nadita, too, had listened very eagerly.

"And who is the Padrón?" she asked when he stopped.

Chico leaned forward on the stone and pointed. "Do you see that long wall that goes along this side of the stream?" he asked.

Nadita looked at him quickly and then spoke slowly, "Yes," she said. "That is a place that I know."

"He owns it," said Chico a little proudly. "The Padrón owns that place—and I know him."

Nadita looked at him with a quick new interest, and there were words that came to the end of her tongue, but she did not speak them now. A sudden thought had come to her mind. Behind that long wall lay a wonderful garden that was deserted and fast falling into ruin. It was blocks and blocks long, and almost as wide. There were great eucalyptus trees and thickets of shrubs and sunken marble pools where swans still floated looking down at their own reflections in the still, dark water. And there were stone summerhouses tumbling into ruin and covered with rose vines, and cool green stretches of grass grown thick and tall, and marble seats almost lost in the

wild growth of vines and bushes, and long walks and little secret doors that might lead anywhere. It was the thought of this garden that had come to Nadita —surely there would be some place in it where a little girl could hide—where she could make a home place until she could find another. Already she had gone there, day after day, when no one knew where she was. She had found a way in, a secret way, and in a tumble-down summerhouse that was so hidden with vines that almost she had to search for it herself, she had hidden Lucita and Fina, her two dolls—who waited for her to come again. But Poco—would a little dog stay quiet in a place like that—and if he did not stay quiet, what would that man say—that Padrón that Chico spoke about? These were very big thoughts, so big that Nadita frowned at the bigness of them, and Chico saw her frown—but she did not tell him what she was thinking—not yet.

"I know," he said then suddenly, so suddenly that the others gave a little jump. "We will ask Pancho. Pancho is very wise, and he will tell us what to do."

"Yes, let us go to Pancho. Let us go now," cried Juan, jumping up from the stone. "Pancho will tell us."

"Who is Pancho?" asked Nadita, as she got up very promptly, as Juan had done.

"He is the potter who makes the jars over there on the other side of the stream."

"Oh, yes," said Nadita quickly, so quickly that she did not think what she was saying. "I have seen him many times from the wall of the garden."

"What garden?" asked Chico, and looked at her with surprise.

Nadita looked down, confused; she had not meant to let them know about the garden yet. But now she must explain.

"Do not tell him—the Padrón," she said anxiously. "He does not know, but I did not think to do any harm. I found a way to go into the garden—and it is so big he could not need *all* of it. I do not hurt the grass or the trees, and they do not mind my being there—and I have a little place that is nice—oh"—and she drew a deep breath—"how I *love* that garden place! It is from there that I saw the potter under the great tree with his wheel. He sings sometimes while he works, and his song is very nice—I like his song, and it tells me things."

"Yes," nodded Chico, "that is Pancho. Come, we will go to him"; and they did not, any of them, ask more about the garden. Nadita was glad of that.

They jumped from stone to stone in the little

stream to cross it, and it splashed and sang such a happy song that for a little they forgot where they were going. The water was like diamonds in the sunlight, and the soft green moss on the under side of the stones was so beautiful that Nadita wanted to touch it with her fingers. Little flowers grew on the edge of the stream, too, and the air was like good things to eat. What did it matter that she did not have a home place with Tia—all the world was a home place—such a beautiful, beautiful one—and the heart of Nadita sang with joy.

At last they reached the other bank of the stream, and now they could hear the hum of the wheel of the potter. He was singing a song, too, that went with the humming:

"Zum—zum—
Hum—hum—
From the heart of earth they come—
Many clays to make my jar,
Blue and gray from very far—
Brown and black from nearer home.
Zum—zum—
Here they come!"

No one could tell how old was Pancho. He was little and dried up like a stick that has lain a long time in the sun. His face was brown and drawn into

fine wrinkles all over it, with a small wisp of very white hair at each corner of his mouth. But his eyes were bright as glass buttons in the sun, and twinkled and smiled with good humor at all times. It was not known how long he had sat under his great tree making jars by the little stream, but some said that he had not been there always. There was a tale—and it may have been because of the big silver earrings that he wore that all the little boys believed this tale—but it was said that at one time old Pancho had been a bandit, riding on the great Highway of Kings and robbing coaches at the point of a pistol. Pancho, himself, had never said yes or no to this tale, but that may have been because he never was asked whether or not it was true—who would ask such a quiet old twinkly man a question like that? But the silver earrings were there, and it was very true that no one knew where he had come from, and it was also certainly true that he had not been there always. At any rate, now he could be seen under his great tree every day of the year, shaping the jars on his wheel. Great jars and little ones and dishes and fat cups, while all about him on woven mats lay other jars—some finished and baked a beautiful brown, and some just ready for the fire; and there, too, in the deepest shade

of the tree, and leaning in very friendly fashion against the trunk, was the little house where he lived —a house made with his own hands, of boards and thatch and adobe clay.

Always busy was Pancho, but always smiling and friendly, and the jars he made were good jars, and many came to buy.

The four children came close to him, and he looked up keenly and smiled, but he did not take his foot from the treadle of the wheel, and he did not stop shaping the jar he was making. Nadita watched him curiously, but she did not speak, for she knew he could not hear her above the humming of his wheel. In a little, he had finished the jar and laid it carefully on the mat beside him. Then he nodded to the children and wiped the clay from his hands on an old apron that he wore.

Chico it was who spoke first, and the words tumbled from his tongue like water going over one of the smooth stones in the stream. All the story he told of Nadita finding the little dog and of the angry words of Tia telling her never to come back to the home place, and then he told that she had no mother and no father and no place to go. Almost in a breath he spoke, and the eyes of old Pancho opened wider and

wider as he listened, until he threw up both hands at last and looked with a great pity at Nadita.

"Aie—aie!" he cried. "But that is sad—and now what shall we do—what shall we do! Come here," he said kindly to Nadita, and he took her by one hand and put his own under her chin until she looked up into his twinkling, kindly old eyes. He looked long down into her great dark ones and then patted her gently on the cheek. "It will be well," he said then. "It will be well, little one; we will think of a way—always there is a way. And so they call you 'Little Nothing'—hi, well, it is better to be nothing than some things I know—ay—ay," and he laughed gently. "But what of something to eat now? Look how it is getting late. Ah, even the little dog pricks up his ears at that," and he laughed again. And it was very true. Suddenly they all knew that they were hungry—*very* hungry—and the boys grinned broadly at the words of Pancho.

"Let me see, now," he said, and put his finger to his head as if thinking deeply. "There is a fine meat stew in the pot. You, Pedro, will blow the ashes from the fire and make it good and hot, and there are tortillas yonder, and in the basket there are peaches—and

here is a cup for each one with water flowing in plenty at our very door."

And almost as quickly as he could say it, they were all seated on the bank of the sparkly stream with a tortilla twisted into a cornucopia and filled to the top with delicious meat stew in one hand, and a peach in the other, and a cup of cold water on the grass beside each one, and *never* had Nadita eaten a meal that tasted so good. Even Poco ate until his little sides swelled out plainly to be seen—and a voice sang in the heart of Nadita until it was hard not to keep time to it with her feet on the grass.

"Three new friends," sang the voice. "Three new friends—and a wise one who will take care of you, and a little live pet dog—and days—and days—and *days* when happy things will happen—and no one to scold. *Oh!*" she cried aloud so that all heard her, "I am glad, glad, glad, to be alive and in this place!"

And old Pancho smiled at her with a great understanding in his eyes.

Suddenly they all knew that they were hungry.

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CHAPTER III

THE ROAD OF KINGS

The voice of the stream is clear and deep,
As it slips along on its silv'ry way;
And into my flute it seems to creep,
A low, drowsy song from the land of sleep,
And whispers and murmurs and seems to say
That life is the sweetest at close of day!

IT FELT very comfortable to have eaten plenty of meat stew and then to see the sky grow softly pink and change into lavender and misty gray with one big star shining all alone. And to hear the water go slipping by in the little stream, and the sleepy call of nesting birds—almost Nadita nodded, as Poco was nodding, and then suddenly she heard the voice of Chico. He was leaning forward and spoke in a voice that was a little breathless—he spoke to Pancho.

"Is it true," he asked, "that—that one time you were not like this? That one time you were bandit—is it true, Pancho?"

Pancho was smoking one of the little white ciga-

rettes that he smoked always when he was not making jars, and Nadita could see the end of it grow bright in the dusky twilight and then fade again as he drew on it before answering.

The three boys and Nadita waited with fast-beating hearts for what he would answer. Not ever had anyone asked Pancho that thing before, and they wondered eagerly what he would say. In the dim light they could not see the look in his eyes. He drew again on the cigarette and then answered at last, very slowly:

"Over to the south of this place there is a road—it is built of great blocks of stone and is very old. It runs for leagues and leagues over hills and down into the valleys and across big spaces—have you seen this road?"

"Oh, yes," they answered, almost in one breath. "Every day we see that road."

Pancho nodded, "It is the Road of Kings," he said. "Not now—not for a great time has it been that. But in the first days, when they built it, and for long after that. At first they were a people that we do not know about, but then there was great fighting and others came—and after that still others, and again it became the Road of Kings."

Pancho.

The eyes of Nadita and of the three boys grew large with excitement; this was a tale they were to hear—and they drew nearer to Pancho on the grass. Almost dark it was now, and the little stream reflected the bright sparkle of stars. Only the tiny glow from his cigarette lit dimly the face of Pancho and gave him very much the look of the full moon when it hangs in a thin red mist over the edge of the world.

"One very dark night, the Road of Kings was hardly to be seen—winding in and out among the hills. There had been much fighting in the big city, and the Padrón (the head of a household or of a ranch is very often called the Padrón, in Mexico)—the very same Padrón who lives right here in our city now—had great fear that his life was in danger. So, late this night, the big coach was brought out, and in it the wife of the Padrón—the beautiful Señora—and her little son sat, wrapped in dark cloaks, and beside the coach rode the Padrón himself on a great, black horse. There were others who rode with him, and a coachman to drive the coach, but they were all as quiet as ghosts, and even the horses seemed to know that there was danger in any sound. Big sacks were bound over the hoofs of the horses, and the wheels of the coach were wrapped round and round

with many strips of cloth. So, like ghosts, they rode through the streets of the city, with only the smothered jingle of chains and harness buckles and the low rumble of the coach to show that they were not shadows slipping by in the dark. Out upon the Road of Kings they came at last and, except for themselves, it was empty for a long way—even in the dark they could see that. On and on they rode, and the little son slept in the lap of his mother, but the Señora did not sleep, for fear was in her heart—fear of that which was behind and of that which might be before. And with the Señora in the coach rode a maid who was very young and pretty to look on. She sobbed and sobbed, this little maid, and after a while the Señora looked at her and spoke in a low voice:

"'Why do you cry all the time, Lola?'

"'It is that I am afraid,' sobbed the maid.

"'But why more afraid now? We are riding now to be away from danger.' The Señora spoke to quiet her own fear thoughts as well as those of the little maid.

"'But it is bandits that I fear,' sobbed the maid harder than ever. 'There are tales all over the town that the Road of Kings has many bandits, and look how the jewels of the Señora sparkle, even when there is no light.' It was true, there were diamonds on the

Señora, and the light of them could be seen even in the darkness. Lola stopped sobbing; then:

"'Listen, Señora,' she said, in a whisper. 'If you will put the jewels in this kerchief that I have, I will put them under the cushion of the seat, and then, if bandits come, they will not think to look in that place.'

The Señora thought for a moment, and then she handed the jewels to the maid.

"'You are a great goose, Lolita, and have foolish thoughts—but it will do no harm to have the jewels safe,' and after that the little maid sobbed no more.

"After a while that seemed very long to those who rode in the coach, they came to a part of the road where it was necessary to go very cautiously. There was a cliff on the one side and a deep ravine on the other, and the coachman knew well this place and brought the horses down to a walk—and then, suddenly—they were not alone in the road! All about them were riders with faces they could not see, who held great pistols to their heads. But not one shot was fired, there was no use—even the little son, suddenly wakened from sleep, could see that it was no use to fight—for there were too many of the unknown men. The Señora did not cry out, but even in the star-

light her face was very white, and the little maid sat as if she were carved in stone. No one noticed, in the fear and excitement of that time, that one of the party of the Padrón was missing. When first the strange men had come into the roadway, the coachman had disappeared, and no one thought to search for him. If they had found him," added Pancho slowly, "there would have been no tale to tell."

"Oh," breathed Nadita, "I am glad they did not."

"The Señora," went on Pancho, "sat very still in the coach, even when he who was chief of the bandits —for it was very plain that they were bandits—even when the chief opened the door of the coach and bowed low before her—but the little maid gave a cry that all could hear. 'Señora,' said the bandit chief, for in those days even bandits used great politeness— 'Señora, no harm shall come to you—my word to pledge you that—nor to the child, nor to this girl—nor to anyone for the matter of that—I desire but a moment's speech with your noble husband——' and at that moment something happened, very suddenly!

"There were the sounds of shots and shouts and confusion of horses' hoofs, and, as quickly as they had come, the bandits disappeared in the darkness.

"It was the coachman who shot the two pistols

rapidly, one after the other, and rolled small stones down the cliff-side and shouted as loudly as two men could shout, and when the bandits had gone the Padrón, with a twirl of his black mustache, ordered that the coach be turned about and they rode back home to the big city.

"'For,' said he, 'there *may* be danger, there at home—but here we know of a certainty that there *is* danger. And at home at least we can be comfortable while we wait.' And not until then did anyone notice that the little maid, Lolita, was gone, and with her were gone the jewels of the Señora. It was for that reason that the bandits had been so easily frightened away (already they had what they had come for, the beautiful jewels of the Señora), and the coachman was not the great hero that he had thought to be. And so," smiled Pancho, "that is as near as ever I came to being a bandit, and that is the end of the tale."

"But," cried Chico, "you did not tell us—was it you who were the bandit chief?"

"No," said Pancho, and even in the light from his almost dying cigarette they could see the flash of his white teeth. "No, I was not that bandit chief—the coachman, that was me."

There was silence for a long time after he had finished, and then Nadita gave a little sigh. It was very exciting to hear of bandits, but now it was very dark, and into her mind crept quickly the wonder of where she would sleep this night. The thought of the garden did not seem so fine now. It was big there and black, and full of dark hiding places, and she had no blanket, and the air grew chill.

It was plain to see that the boys, too, were waiting to know what she would do, and if old Pancho would have a plan. He still sat and smoked, and in his eyes were many dreams and memories.

It was Chico, as always, who spoke first.

"My mother will call for me," he said. "See, how it is very late," and all three of the boys rose quickly from the grass and looked toward Nadita with little worry looks.

Pancho took the cigarette from his mouth.

"I shall sleep here on the grass to-night," he said. "Yes, it grows late—go now and come to-morrow. Often I sleep on this grass, and you," he nodded toward Nadita, "you shall sleep on the mat in my house. There are blankets there, and you will sleep well. To-morrow we shall see—we shall see," and he nodded toward the boys. "When you come, we shall

all see," and he smiled broadly. "I think we have one big family now. I am the father and you are the children. Well, well—to-morrow we make plan about the home place," and his bright eyes twinkled as the boys, with answering grins, slipped away into the darkness.

To Nadita, the little house was very strange, and in the light of the candle Pancho gave her it looked large.

The walls were of plastered mud, and on them, hanging everywhere, were jars of curious shapes. Some were like little monkeys, and some were very beautiful and smooth, and others like fish and turtles, but they all made long black shadows on the walls from the flickering light of the candle, and it seemed to Nadita that the shadows were living things that looked at her with eyes she could not see.

Everything was very neat and clean, and on the floor was the mat, woven thick of reeds, that was to be her bed, and at one end of it were blankets neatly folded. The only other furnishing in the room was a small table and a chair.

Nadita put Poco down on the folded blankets, he had slept soundly ever since he had eaten his supper, and now he did not even open his eyes when she put

him down, but lay as she placed him and snored steadily. It was very nice to have a little live pet, and Nadita smiled happily as she looked at him—lonely thoughts could not stay very long while he was here.

Then she held the candle high above her head and looked again at the queer hanging jars all about her —they seemed to have for her a fascination, and she could not keep from looking at them. One was painted in red and black in a most curious pattern of little jumping figures, and she held the candle very close to see. The flickering flame seemed to make the figures dance, and then suddenly a little puff of wind touched the flame to the cotton cord that held the jar, and with a crash that seemed louder than anything Nadita had ever heard before, it dropped to the ground and shattered into many pieces.

For a long moment she stood perfectly still—things happened so very suddenly this day—and this was a very bad thing to happen. Pancho had been good and kind, and it made a hurt place come into her heart to think how he would be sorry for this. His quiet voice spoke to her from the outside as he pushed open the wooden door.

"Has harm come to you, little one? See, Pancho is here."

"Oh, not to me," cried Nadita in a voice that trembled so that the words would hardly come, "but look at this that I have done—it was the flame of the candle—I looked to see the little jar. Oh, Pancho, but I have sorrow for this thing. I think—I think I must go now, so that I cannot bring more hurt to you."

"Foolish one," said the old man, and patted her gently on her little black head. "There is no harm that is done. See, how I can quickly make another jar the very same as the broken one. Only I thought —for a moment I thought, when the noise came— that another had fallen. Look, there is one here that hangs for a purpose." And Pancho reached for a very fat black jar and lifted it by its cord from a peg on the wall. Where the jar had been hanging was a black hole in the mud of the wall and the old man took from it a small bag that looked to Nadita to be heavy.

"This is to buy bread for Pancho when he is very old," he said, smiling, and shook it gently; the bag gave a soft jingle. "It is not much, but it is all that old Pancho has, and will be enough—— But why do you look so strange?"

Nadita was looking past old Pancho at the doorway, and her eyes were large and dark in the candle-

light, and even Poco stirred a little and growled in his sleep.

"Maybe it was a shadow," said Nadita in a low voice. "Something moved—something tall, like a man—at the doorway."

CHAPTER IV

THE OLD HACIENDA

Oh, Life is gay,
On the King's Highway,
In the early hours of a summer day!

And all of me sings
With the dance of things,
That come and go on the Road of Kings!

QUICK as thought at the words of Nadita the old man reached for the candle and snuffed out the flame with his fingers, and at that very moment a voice called out in the darkness.

"Holá, Pancho—so early to bed? You have a visitor, and if my eyes have told me truly, more than one."

"It is the Padrón," cried Pancho, with a great relief in his voice, and quickly he made light again. "Ai-ee, Señor Padrón," he said. "How I am glad to see you. Not yet do I go to sleep—oh, no, it is early for that. No, it was another matter that shut out the light." And, as a tall gentleman stooped into the little

doorway with surprise in his eyes, very quickly Pancho told him all that was to be told about the little bag and about Nadita, and lastly he spoke of the shadow at the door. And at that the Padrón grew very grave.

"The shadow at the door was real," he said. "I, myself, saw it, and as I came near it slipped away into the night. You must have care, Pancho, of that little bag of yours, or others will buy bread with what it contains. This time I have saved it by coming, but the next time I may not be here."

"The next time," answered old Pancho, "it will have a new hiding place, one that is better than this one." And he smiled at the Padrón.

He was a very fine gentleman, was this Señor Padrón—tall and with white hair and beard, and his eyes were so kind that, in a very little, Nadita found herself close at his side, looking up into his face, and he was smiling down at her. He sat very naturally in the only chair, and it was plain to see that he came often to the little house of Pancho. They spoke as old friends speak, and had the light of understanding in their eyes.

Long into the night the two men talked together, and though they spoke of old times and many inter-

esting things, Nadita could not listen long. Very strangely heavy grew her eyes, and soon she slipped down by Poco on the blankets and closed her eyes just to see how it felt—and it felt very comfortable —but—it was such a strange thing that, when she shut her eyes, it was black dark with the candle flame waving back and forth on the table, and when she opened them right away again, it was sparkly daylight, and she was covered up cosily on the little mat bed and tucked in with soft blankets. Poco, too, was awake and watching her as she opened her eyes, and just as soon as they were truly open, he pushed his little pink nose against her cheek and wriggled his whole small body up on top of the blankets. And then, like a flash, Nadita remembered—there was no Tia to scold this day, and there were new things to do. She jumped from the bed so quickly that Poco rolled over and over in a little heap on the blankets and Nadita laughed as she put him on the floor on his short, wabbly legs.

"Oh, but there are things to do, Poco," she cried, and as she spoke she was carefully folding up the blankets of the mat bed—and then she sniffed—there was a very good smell coming in at the doorway.

"Hi!" called old Pancho from outside. "So you are up, Little Nothing. Here is food to eat, and I have wonderful news for you."

Nadita danced out into the shining sunlight. Oh, surely this was not the same world where she had always lived! Never before had the sky been so blue, or the grass so green, or the air so tingly, and the smell of the bacon old Pancho was frizzling over the little charcoal stove was the most delicious odor she had ever known. There were tortillas, too, and goat's milk and peaches—and in a little the boys would be here. Pancho was watching her with twinkling eyes as she ate, her happiness made him very happy, and his old heart danced in time with hers.

"Wait," he said then. "I have something here for you," and he handed her a bundle wrapped in brown paper. "The Padrón gave me money to buy them for you, and very early this day I have been to the market-place."

The heart of Nadita beat faster than ever as she took the bundle and carefully opened it. It was a pair of very stiff, very squeaky-looking yellow *shoes!*

"Oh," she said, and the sound of her voice was so queer that Pancho stopped smiling.

"They are very nice," she tried to say, and she

tried very hard to say it as if it was a true thing, but the right sound would not come.

"All little girls wear shoes," said Pancho, and he was puzzled at the look in her face.

"Maybe they are not the right size," said Nadita, and there was a sound of hope in her voice. "I think, maybe, they are not the right size."

"We will get others, then," said Pancho. "We will try them and see."

"Oh," said Nadita then, in a voice that came as if something had pushed it from the inside, "do all little girls *have* to wear shoes? Pancho, I would like *not* to wear shoes!"

"So!" said Pancho, and the smile came back to his eyes. "So that is it—no shoes—well, I had not thought of that. I had thought it was because there was no money that you did not wear shoes."

Nadita wriggled her bare toes in the dust—how good the dust felt! "Do you think the Padrón will be angry? They are very, *very* nice shoes."

"I had forgetten," said old Pancho then, suddenly. "There is something very good for to-morrow. The Padrón goes to his sugar hacienda. It is a great way from here, over the Road of Kings, and we will ride on burros, and he has said that you may go!"

Nadita shot up from the grass as if she had been on springs and threw her arms about the neck of Pancho, and then she began to dance excitedly up and down before him—her eyes were like stars.

"Oh, that is the most wonderful thing that ever could be! And can the boys go, Pancho? And what is a sugar hacienda? And little burros to ride on—oh, *oh!* How long will it be until that time. Do you think I can wait that long time? I will wear the shoes—oh, I will be very good and wear the shoes."

Pancho smiled broadly. "It will not matter about the shoes. I will tell the Padrón, and he will understand. But, look who has come—no, I think the boys cannot go—the Padrón has not said that they could go."

Nadita had been too excited to notice that the boys were coming across the stream, and now she told them very quickly about what was to happen the next day.

"I know that place," said Chico, and he was careful not to let his voice show how greatly he would like to go. "It is a very fine place—my father went there one time."

Nadita looked at the three boys, and now a little the happy thoughts went out of her heart, for she

wished very much that they could go, too, but Pancho began to talk of other things.

"I have thought of a good plan," he said, "if everyone will help. We will build a little room on my house here for this Little Nothing," and he pinched her cheek. "Look, how it will be easy. We have wood here, and clay, and the leaves of the palm for a roof—and beside it we can make a very little house for Poco."

Nadita clapped her hands at that, and right away they started in to work.

The boys were very eager to help—it was like a new game—and before the night time it was finished.

"It was very lucky there was work to do this day," said old Pancho that evening, as he looked at Nadita with a bright twinkle in his eye. "If there had not been work to do, I think maybe you would have blown right up and gone to little pieces in thinking of to-morrow."

Nadita smiled happily. "But I am glad, too, about my little house," she said, "and the little house for Poco. I think I will not sleep one wink this night. There are so many—so *very* many things to think about."

But she *did* sleep that night, and in the morning

Poco was awake before she was, as he had been the day before, and Pancho was all ready with good things to eat, and she had to hurry a little, as she knew the Padrón would go very early to the hacienda.

"We do not go to him," said Pancho. "He will come this way, for the road goes out from here. And look—he comes now!"

There was a great splashing in the little stream, and the Padrón rode up on a beautiful black horse with silver all over the bridle and saddle; he wore a great hat that sparkled with silver braid, and beside him rode another man on a horse, but the Padrón looked far more grand than he.

After them, splashing through the water, came the burros and the men who were to drive them. Some of the burros were loaded with supplies for the hacienda, but one had a funny little wooden cross-saddle on it, and one had a little pad far down on his back, it looked to Nadita to be almost slipping off. The little saddle was for her with a thick blanket thrown over it and she felt as if she were sitting in a very shaky chair away up in the air, and the pad was for Pancho, who looked as if any minute he would slip off down the back of the burro; but he did not, and Nadita noticed that the other men who rode burros rode in

Nadita felt as if she were sitting in a very shaky chair.

just the same way. The Padrón and his friend waved to them and smiled and then rode on, as their horses went much faster than the burros.

This was like a tale come true, a wonderful tale, and Nadita shut her eyes for a moment just to listen to the sounds of things.

There was the "tap-tap-tap" of the burros' hard little feet on the stones and the creaking of bundles on their backs—the whack of sticks or hands of the drivers on the hides of the burros to keep the lazy little animals moving—and the laughter and talk of the men, and one of them was singing. Then, there were the birds in the trees and the cheery cries of "*adiós*" from the people they passed by the roadside, and the smell of fresh dust and saddle-straps and jasmine and morning dew. But Nadita could not keep her eyes closed for long, for there was much to see as well as hear. In the distance, a mountain peak covered with snow, and then blue hills, and nearer at hand more blue hills, and little adobe houses, and gardens filled with roses and oleanders and jasmine and pomegranate trees and children, and dogs who barked like Poco—only Poco did not bark now—at least, where she could hear him. A little wistful look came into the eyes of Nadita, for Poco was shut

up in his little new house with a dish of food and a warm blanket to sleep on, for Pancho had said, and wisely, that it was very easy to lose so small a dog when they went so great a way from home.

And then Nadita watched the many people who passed them on the Road of Kings—some were going the way *they* were going, and some were on their way into the town they had just left. There was the milkman with his many little goats and his soft-eyed cow, who would go from door to door in the town giving only the freshest milk, warm and frothy and milked right into your own jug; and the man with many crates of chickens on his back bound for the marketplace; and a man so piled up with hats—on top of him and hanging in strings all around him—that Nadita had to look carefully to see that there was a man at all—at first it looked as if a great stack of hats was walking into town all of itself! And then there were beggars—many of them—and they made the heart of Nadita to ache with pity. But Pancho told her that to every one they passed the Padrón would give money—and after that she felt better about them.

And then at one time there was a jingle and a clatter, and a dashing company of Rurales passed

them. The little burros had to push to the side of the road, and the dust was so thick they could hardly see, but Nadita saw the fine horses—all of one color—and the silver buttons down the sides of the trousers of the riders, and their big hats heavy with silver braid.

"There go the Bandits," smiled Pancho, when they had passed, and one of the men laughed aloud. But it is a true thing that they say all of the Rurales, who are good soldiers and police now, were at one time bandits in the hills—for who can so well catch a thief as he who knows the ways of a thief!

And, after that they came to a queer little man with a tray in his hands heaped high with the candy made of cactus. Nadita saw him, but she looked carefully away, for the candy was good, and it made her hungry to see it. But Pancho did not look the other way. He pulled his burro to a stop, and all the others stopped very quickly, as they liked very much to do. And Nadita saw that he bought some of the candy made of cactus.

"This is for you," said Pancho, when the burros had started again, and he gave to Nadita a little package of the candy, and he was very pleased at the words of thanks she gave him. But, very strangely, Nadita did not eat the candy. She waited until

Pancho looked another way, and then she slipped it into the loose front of her little waist. But Pancho saw, even if he did seem to look the other way, and his eyes opened wide with surprise.

"Why do you not eat it?" he asked, and Nadita grew very red; she did not know that anyone had seen the thing that she did.

"In a little," she said in a low voice, and her cheeks grew redder than before.

Pancho did not take his eyes from her face, and he frowned a little.

"Is it that you tasted it and find that it is not good?" he asked.

"Oh, no," answered Nadita, and she did not look at him as she spoke. "It is those boys—they—they could not come, and very *much* they like the candy of cactus!"

Pancho gave a great laugh then, and there was relief in the sound of it.

"Look at this great lot that I have bought," he cried; "all of it is for them, if you like—but you are to eat the little you have right at this time—while I watch you." And Nadita ate it quickly, and it was so good that she was glad there was more for the boys, and Pancho nodded when she had eaten it.

"For later, maybe there is more," he said, "but not for now." And a girl with a red camellia in her hair smiled at her, and Nadita smiled back.

It was a great way to the sugar hacienda, and the stiff-legged trot of the little burro soon made Nadita think of how comfortable it was to walk on her own bare feet, but after a long time they reached there, and she forgot all about being tired in the excitement of new things to see.

"The Padrón has something for me to do," said Pancho, when they got down in the big, busy courtyard of the hacienda. "Here is breakfast for you to eat." And he gave into Nadita's hand two big tamales. (They are made of ground corn with meat and sauce of chili pepper and are wrapped in corn husks, and the kind made in Mexico are very, very delicious.) "And for sweet and drink," said Pancho, "there is sugar cane all around you—eat all that you want. And you can look all over this place, only have a care and get in the way of no one, and do not fall into the sugar pots. When the sun is low, come back to this patio, and I will meet you here and we will return home." And Pancho walked into a great doorway and was gone.

Nadita had a little queer feeling at first to be left

alone in this strange place, but that did not last long —all around were things happening, different things, and she soon forgot to feel lonely in the excitement of watching.

Carts with only two very big wheels came one after the other into the big courtyard, and these were loaded with purply-brown sugar cane which they dumped in front of a great open door and then rode away for a new load. Just in front of where the cane was dumped were two fat baby burros with soft, silky hair, and they ate sugar cane constantly without, it seemed to Nadita, even stopping for breath. She went up to one and put her hand on his fuzzy coat, and he looked at her with big brown eyes, and then she put *both* her arms around him and hugged him tight, and he seemed to like it, but he did not stop eating for one moment.

"It must be very good, that cane," said Nadita thoughtfully, and she tasted it, and it *was* good, but one of the men in the carts laughed as he saw her trying to eat it as the little burros ate it.

"You cannot eat it that way," he said. "Look, it must be fixed like this——" and with a very sharp, big knife he chopped off a number of pieces about as long as his hand, and then he cut off all the outside

thick skin and cut the white inside pulp into neat pieces like little white fingers. "Now," he said, "you chew the juice part out of that and then throw it away—and tell me, is it good?"

"It is *very* good," said Nadita, "and I give you thanks, and almost I wish I was a little burro, so that I could stand here and eat all the time." And all the men in the carts gave a big laugh when Nadita said that, and then she did not feel lonely any more.

It was fun to watch how the sugar cane was put into great crushers after it was brought from the courtyard, and the juice poured out in a never-stopping stream into the big tanks and boilers in the House of Saints. The House of Saints was called that because each one of the great boilers was named for a saint. There were San Pedro and San Juan and San Diego, and there were others. It made Nadita's eyes to open very wide to hear the men call:

"Make it warmer under San Pedro—San Juan is getting cold!" They would say that for the men, down where the furnaces were, to build the fires hotter under the boilers called by those names, but it sounded very queer.

There were men stirring the boiling sugar with great ladles, and it looked so good to Nadita that she

grew hungry again and ate one of her tamales while she watched.

When the brown sugar had boiled until it was thick and bubbly, they poured it into hundreds of queer peaked jars, like gnomes' hats turned upside down, and when the sugar was hard, a layer of black, wet clay was packed on top of it in the queer jars, and the men told Nadita this was to make it white, and they laughed at the funny look on her face when they said it, for the look said that she did not think that they told true, but they showed her other jars in which the clay had dried, and they turned the sugar out in great, peaked lumps—and it *was* whiter where the clay had been. They put the lumps—rows and rows of them—out in the sun to whiten still more, and then Nadita could see that it was just like the sugar she always had used at home.

"'Way up in other places," said one of the men to Nadita, "they do not make sugar like we make it. Look at this——" and he led her over to a great room so big that she could not see the other end. "In this room, the Padrón has the machines to make the sugar like they make it in some other places. A man from the North came here a great while ago and told the Padrón he could make better sugar and much more

of it that way—but the Padrón makes the sugar like his fathers made it, and the people want the sugar like we make it. See how the red rust is eating the great machines!"

But just then Nadita heard a sound that she could not understand, and she turned her head to listen. From the House of Saints it came, and a little it made her think of the time when she had found Poco. The men went on with their work and did not seem to hear the sound, but Nadita ran as fast as she could back to the House of Saints. At first she thought that it was empty, all except the great pots of boiling sugar that were let down into the floor with only a narrow walk between them. The men who stirred the pots were not there, but then she saw very quickly what had made the sound. A very fat little brown baby was looking into one of the pots. He squealed with delight when the great steamy bubbles burst, and reached for them with both hands. When she saw him, the heart of Nadita seemed to jump right up into her throat and then began to beat like a little drum.

"Come," she said softly to the baby, and her voice did not have the sound that it usually had. She had great fear that she might frighten the baby, and then

how easily he might fall into that great bubbling pot. At first he did not hear her, for the noise of the boiling sugar was louder than the sound she made, so Nadita called again.

"Come to Nadita—come here to Nadita, little one." The baby turned quickly then, and when he saw her he smiled and held out his hands again to the bubbles in the big pot—he was asking for them.

"No, no," said Nadita quickly, and then she took a cautious step toward him, but the baby squealed very loudly then and tottered away from her on legs that were far from steady. He ran around the pot and laughed again—this was a great game he was playing—but always Nadita saw that the edges of the pots were very low and the steam had an ugly sound as it burst out of the bubbles.

The baby watched her now with bright eyes and stuck one small fist into his mouth thoughtfully. If she moved toward him, he always ran away, and she wondered with a big fear thought how it was going to be possible to catch him before anything could happen. She called out then as loudly as she could to the men outside, but no one heard her. It seemed as if suddenly there was a great noise everywhere, and her voice was very small.

"Gug—gug—ooo!" said the baby, and looked at her with a question in his eyes. Why did she not play some more? He was such a sweet baby, and the arms of Nadita ached to hold him close.

Then from outside came another sound—it was a woman calling.

"My baby—my little, little one. Where are you? Oh, where is that baby?" and the little eyes of the baby sparkled more than ever at Nadita as he heard the voice—for it was very plain that he *did* hear—but he did not make one move to go in answer to it.

"There is the mamma," said Nadita coaxingly. "There is the mamma of baby—you must go"; and then, in the doorway of the House of Saints, a woman suddenly appeared—a woman so fat that Nadita felt her mouth drop open as she looked at her. Surely no woman could be so big and fat as that! The baby saw her, too, and began quickly to run again between the boiling pots.

"Oh!" shrieked the woman, when she saw him. "Catch him! Catch him!" It was to Nadita she called, and she herself started after the baby, but it was very plain that never in the world could she catch anything at all and Nadita felt that the whole house shook when she moved. "He will fall into the

pots!" called the woman in a voice that was filled with terror. "Can you not see? He will fall into the pots!"

Nadita did not take the time to answer, but a cold place came into her heart as she saw how the baby stumbled on the narrow place and how the bubbles seemed to call to him. He squealed louder than ever now, and ran as fast as his little legs could carry him, not looking ahead at all, but backward at Nadita and at his mother.

Afterward, Nadita did not know how anything could happen so quickly, but, as the baby ran and they were looking at him, very suddenly someone else ran forward from the other doorway and then—there was the baby, high in the air, safe in the arms of old Pancho! And the woman dropped, sobbing, just where she was in the narrow walk, and for a little Nadita thought that maybe *she* was going to fall into the boiling pot, but then she knew that would not be possible, for no pot in all the world was large enough to hold her!

The baby was immediately very happy with Pancho, and turned to Nadita a smiling face as if nothing at all had happened.

"Oh," said Nadita to Pancho, and not yet was her

voice quite right, "how good that you came at this time! We could not catch him, and I was afraid."

Pancho was smiling now. "To be afraid does not help," he said. "We can never have the right thoughts to help if we are afraid"; and then a look came into his face that Nadita did not understand; he held the baby in his arms and walked past her to the fat woman, who looked up as he came.

"My memory is very good," he said, as he came close to her, "and faces do not change greatly with the years. What have you done, Lolita, with those jewels?"

With a great effort, the fat woman got to her feet and wiped the tears from her eyes with the back of her hand, and then she answered him without surprise in her voice and as if she had a great weariness:

"Yes, you are right—my memory is good, too, and tells me that you are Pancho. I am Lolita, but not ever did I have the jewels to keep. He took them away from me and he beat me—always he beat me—I was glad when the soldiers took him away. And now I have a good husband who does not beat me—but always, always I have had a sad feeling about the Señora and that I took those jewels. I know that now she is gone, but still my heart has very sorry

thoughts." Then she looked up suddenly and pointed to Nadita. "This little one—who is she?"

"A Little Nothing," answered Pancho gently. "A little one no one knows, but who brings only love wherever she goes."

The woman looked at Nadita for a long moment. "I think," she said then slowly, "that not always will she be that Nothing—very soon she will not be that. Something *here* tells me." And she put her hand to her breast, and then with a sudden movement she took the baby in her arms and turned and walked out of the building.

The twinkle came back into the eyes of Pancho as he looked after her, and he nodded to Nadita.

"That bandit did not have a very happy family," he said. "Even jewels do not always make for happiness—is it not so, my Little Nothing?"

Nadita was looking at him with big eyes of wonder.

"But I think I do not understand," she said slowly. "In the tale about the bandit, the little maid who took the jewels—you said she was a *little* maid."

Pancho threw back his head and laughed until there were echoes in the House of Saints.

"It is that Lolita is fat now—that is why you wonder—but it is the very same Lolita, and other little

girls can grow big and fat, too, if they eat much of the candy of cactus and the little cakes made of nuts"; and Pancho laughed again at the look in her face.

"But I think," said Nadita very thoughtfully, "I will not be *that* big and fat—see how there is not skin enough."

And she looked at Pancho with such a great seriousness that he did not laugh again.

CHAPTER V

POCO IS LOST

Oh, sing a song of the bubbling pot,
When the evening air grows chill;
And the work is done in the plowing plot,
And the fruit is in from the hill!

Oh, sing a song of the home fire's glow,
And the ones we love the best.
When the noise of the day grows sweet and low,
And the new moon hangs in the west!

NADITA had thought and thought—but somehow the right thought would not come.

Soon would be the saint day of Pancho, the day when he was born, and there was no present she could give him.

She had spoken to Chico and Juan and Pedro about it, but they had not helped very much, they did not know what she could give.

At first she had thought to make a jar—a very different and beautiful jar in the place of the one she had broken that night—and for days she had waited until the time when Pancho would go away from the

home place so that she could make it. And then, one day, he went to the market-place, and a little he was surprised at how happy Nadita had been to see him go.

"Do not come back very soon," she cried after him, and there was excitement in her voice. "I will tell you at another time—but do not come back very soon." And Pancho had gone away wondering.

As soon as he was gone, Nadita got the clay. She very carefully chose the kind that would make a jar of beautiful color, and then she looked in a pot for stuff to mix it with. Always Pancho mixed the clay with some stuff, and very often she had seen him take some from that very pot. But when it was mixed with the clay it did not look right, and very *much* it did not *feel* right. It stuck to her hands and then to her dress, and she did not know how it happened at all, but soon there was some in her hair and on her face, and very quickly her hands grew as big as squashes. She could not take any clay off at all and when she tried, it just stuck to everything she touched, and bigger and bigger grew her hands. Chico and Juan and Pedro had come then and with a shout of excitement and much advice they had started in to help her. But a terrible thing happened then, for each one

of them got clay all over himself just as Nadita had done and very soon she was afraid there would be nothing at all but sticky, dark clay over everything —no house and no place to live at all. And it was then that Pancho came home.

At first he stood very still, and Nadita thought that never had she seen his eyes so big, and then he sat down on a rock and laughed and laughed until the echoes answered him from far away in the garden of the Padrón. After that had been a very dreadful time, for Pancho had to work hard for many hours to get the clay back into the place where it belonged. But he was not angry—not ever had Nadita seen Pancho angry—he only explained very kindly and carefully that the stuff in the pot that they had used was not to mix with the clay but was just to give the shiny finish to the jars after they were all made.

But Nadita decided that she would *not* make a jar for the saint day of Pancho—and little red spots came into her cheeks at the very thought of it—no, it would have to be something very different from that.

But there were not many things that a little girl could make, and she had no money to buy with—not one centavo—and not any way could she think to earn some. She worked very hard for Pancho when

she brushed out his house in the morning, and shook his blankets until there was no dust in them, and wiped off every jar until it was shiny and clean, but no one in all the town would pay for work like that. For in every house—in every one that Nadita had ever seen—there was always a woman or a girl who did that work, and so they did not need anyone else.

Right in the middle of her thinking came the excited voice of Chico, and the words he spoke made Nadita jump up quickly with alarm in her eyes.

"Do you know where is Poco?" he called, and then, when he came close, Nadita could see by his eyes and by the eyes of Juan and Pedro and by their panting breath that they had run a long way, and that something very unusual had happened.

A little fear feeling came quickly into her heart, and she looked sharply around—no, Poco was not there. Just a little while ago he had been there, she had seen him, but now he was nowhere in sight.

"Where is he?" she cried. "What has happened—did you see him?"

"Listen," said Pedro. "Maybe she will give you two dollars—that is great wealth."

"I will tell her," broke in Chico. "I spoke to the lady."

"Oh," cried Nadita, "tell me quickly. What is this thing? And where is my little Poco?"

"Your Poco is in a very safe place," said Chico, "and if you let the lady have him she will give you money and he will live always on chicken meat—she told me that."

A look almost of terror came into the eyes of Nadita.

"I want my Poco," she said again in a voice that trembled a little. "Tell me, where is that little Poco?"

"I will tell," said Pedro, and he pushed himself in front of Chico. "A little while ago we were playing in the old Alameda, and then in front of me very suddenly was Poco. I think maybe he followed us to that place. When we saw Poco, a lady walking saw him, too, and she called to him in a voice like honey —'Come, little dog. Nice little dog,' and Poco went to her quickly, and she took him up into her arms. 'That is Poco,' Chico called to her, and she looked at him and laughed. 'I will buy him,' she said. 'Is he your dog?' 'No, but I know the one who has him,' said Chico. 'Then go get him,' said the lady, and so we have come. I think she is rich. Her dress is very fine and shiny, and she has gold rings on her hands."

"I do not want to sell Poco," cried Nadita. "Take me to where he is."

"But, listen," said Juan, who had not spoken before because the others would not let him. "Listen, Nadita—you told us how it would be the saint day of Pancho soon. If you sell Poco, you could get money to buy a fine present."

A tear rolled down the cheek of Nadita, she could not help it.

"I think," she said in a very low voice, "I think I could not live without that little Poco. Show me the place where the lady has gone."

It was a very long way that they had to go, down through the town—past big *almacenes* (stores) and market-places and *plazas* (parks) and many, many little shops where usually Nadita and the boys would have stopped and looked and looked, but to-day they did not stop. And there were high walls with big iron-work gates where one could look in and see a little fountain playing, and green plants in big pots, and birds swinging in cages. And there were churches that looked cool and dark inside, with the smell of incense tingling the nose, and many beggars sitting on the steps. And there were other places—stores with

painted walls and little swinging doors, and these places smelled very strongly of pulque, and other things that were not good, and they hurried past them with their faces turned away. Nadita knew a great deal about pulque; the husband of Tia drank it and it made him to beat the little children and throw things so that they broke in pieces.

It was a very, very grand place where the lady had gone, a house of stone with portales and shops in the front and a great court inside with a beautiful bougainvillea vine growing up one side; they said it was a hotel, and at first Nadita and the boys thought that they could not go in, but the man at the door was very kind and said he remembered very well the lady with the little dog, and he showed them the room where she was.

For a little they waited outside, afraid to knock at the door, but then Nadita tapped timidly with her fingers, and she liked the voice of the lady when she called to them to come in, and her fear grew very much smaller when she saw her. She was a pretty lady with smiles in her eyes, and she seemed very glad to see all the children, but the first words she said confused Nadita so that her tongue did not want to move.

"You must talk very fast," said the lady, but she

smiled very nicely when she said it. "You must talk very fast, for in just ten minutes I must go in a coach to take the train—so, you see, we have very little time. Is it the little dog you have come about?"

"Oh, yes," said Nadita quickly, and there was a great relief in her voice that this lady should talk about Poco so quickly. "It is my little dog—he is the only pet that I have."

"Oh," said the lady, and she looked closely at Nadita, "do you like him very much?"

Nadita drew a long breath, but only one word could she say, and she said it very softly. "Yes," said Nadita.

"I see," said the lady. "Do you know that he is a very nice little dog? I will give you five dollars for him if you will sell him."

Nadita could hear the sharp breath that the boys drew at that, and a little dull ache came into her heart. Five dollars was such a very great deal of money, more than she had ever hoped to own, and it would buy many wonderful gifts for Pancho and for Chico and Pedro and Juan; she looked down and twisted the fingers of her little hand until they hurt. She could see in her mind the soft brown eyes of Poco and feel the touch of that small, pink tongue, and a

lump place came into her throat; but how happy would be Pancho to have a grand present for his saint day. She drew a great breath.

"Just one more time," she said in a voice that she could not keep from being husky. "Just one little look—could I have—of Poco?"

The lady turned quickly and walked into another room, and in a very little she came back. There was a queer look in her eyes.

"He has gone," she said. "It may be that he ran into the street—I hope he is not lost—but here," she said quickly, and she put a shining silver dollar into the hand of Nadita. "Buy something pretty with this. And I hope sometime you will find that little dog again." And she smiled and leaned down and kissed Nadita on the forehead. "Good-bye," she said then. "The coach is ready for me now."

And in a daze Nadita and the others walked into the street.

"She is a nice lady," said Chico, and then he stopped suddenly, and looked at Nadita. "Five dollars is a great sum of money," he said, and she could not understand the strange sound there was in his voice. "Maybe she did not have that great amount of money—and we did not see in that other room.

"If we will all look in different places—maybe we will find him," said Pedro.

Maybe she thought to buy Poco with the one dollar that she gave to you. Maybe—yet—Poco is in that other room!"

Nadita's heart gave a great jump—what if the words of Chico were true? She hesitated on the corner of the street and looked at the dollar in her hand. And just then a coach came, with much clatter, around the corner, and from the window the lady leaned out and waved and smiled to them as she passed.

"I do not think she would do a bad thing like that," said Nadita, but she said it a little uncertainly; she felt very much as if this were a dream thing that was happening—if the lady had not taken Poco, he was lost, and how would they ever find him again?

"I think," said Pedro, "that Poco is lost—a lady with a smile like that does not steal things—but it will be very hard to find him in all this town—and where is Juan?"

It was true Juan was gone, and Poco was gone, but there was a great difference between them, for Juan knew very well how to reach his own home place and that of Nadita, but Poco did not know, and Poco was very little.

"I think, if we will all look in different places—

maybe we will find him," said Pedro, but there was a very uncertain sound in his voice. He did not think they would find Poco. He had tried other times to look for things in this town, and he had not found them.

"I think he was in that coach," said Chico. "It was very plain that the lady liked Poco when she saw him first, and she did not think to steal when she gave you the dollar."

"Oh," cried Nadita, "I cannot think at all. Let us go back to Pancho quick, and ask him. Always Pancho knows the thing that is right to do." And so, without speaking more, they walked back to where the potter was at work at his wheel. Down every street they looked as they went, and many times they called, but not anywhere at all was Poco.

Pancho was very busy as they came near, and he did not look up from the jar he was making—and Juan was there, too. He had gone faster than they had gone, and was sitting by the stream, throwing little stones into the water—and then—Nadita saw something else—and for a little her heart stood still——

POCO WAS THERE, TOO! Wagging his small bit of a tail and barking as if he understood that now was a time to be very happy!

Nadita did not know how she got across the stream, but right away she was on the grass with Poco in her arms, and she did not care that tears were dropping from her eyes.

"But I do not understand," she said, in a little, suddenly looking up. "How could Poco find the way back to this place, and so quickly?"

"He did not find the way back," said Juan with a wide grin on his face. "I carried him every little bit of the way."

"But," said Nadita, "not yet do I understand—where did you find him?"

"I did not find him," said Juan, and his grin grew into a laugh. "The lady put him right into my arms. She is a very nice lady, and she said, 'Do not say one word to the little girl until you get him home—she loves him more than I do.'"

"Oh," said Nadita, and there was a shine in her eyes. "How good is *every*body!" And then, for a long time, she did not say anything more, for into her mind had come suddenly the thought of the present for the saint day of Pancho, and the wonder of planning was in her heart.

CHAPTER VI

A DISCOVERY

Look—how the sunlight under the trees
Falls in a pattern of golden leaves!
And wavering shadows, clear and cool,
Each has the look of a crystal pool!
And see—how the flowerlets in the grass
Bend to the fairy feet that pass—
And everywhere blossoms weave fragrant lace—
Hush!—There is magic in this place!

NADITA was sitting under the big tree all by herself, thinking. It was a thing she did not do very often, but there was much to think about, this day, that was nice. She had bought a beautiful thing for the saint day of Pancho, and he had liked it—he had gone to the market-place with it on, this very day—it was around his neck—a handkerchief of silk with colors in it like the colors of the flowers in the garden of the Padrón. Nadita had thought, at first, to buy him a gold watch like the one the Padrón always wore but they told her at the store that a gold watch would cost more than one dollar, and then she had tried to

buy a sarape blanket, very soft and warm, with red and green stripes, but they said that, too, was more than one dollar. It was very strange how many things there were to buy that would cost always more than one dollar, but then—and Nadita gave a big sigh of content—the handkerchief was very, very beautiful, and there was no doubt at all that it gave to Pancho a happy feeling to wear it around the neck—and then—— She gave a big jump, for Chico had come up so quietly that she had not heard him come, and he sat down on a rock and threw little stones into the water of the stream without speaking at all. Nadita looked at him and opened her eyes wide—it was very queer for Chico not to talk, but this time he seemed to be thinking things as she had been thinking, and she watched him for a little without speaking—and then he spoke to her so suddenly that she gave another little jump.

"Is it true that you have no mother at all?" he said, and he looked quickly to see if she were angry, but a little, wistful smile came into the eyes of Nadita as she answered—and she was not angry.

"I haven't only *one* mother," she said, and she said it very gravely, like a little old woman would talk. "I have a great *many* mothers"; and then she waited

for the question that she knew very well would come. And it came just as she thought it would, with a great tone of unbelief:

"Who *are* those many mothers that you have?"

"Listen," said Nadita. "Do you hear that soft sound up in the top part of this tree?"

"It is the wind," answered Chico quickly.

"Yes, it is the wind—and I think that is *one* of my mothers. So softly she whispers to me all the day long—and in the afternoon time she sings for me to go to sleep."

"Huh!" said Chico. "*That* kind of a mother!—and who are the others?"

"Can you hear the little stream there at the edge of the grass?—can you hear what it is saying?"

Almost unconsciously Chico listened a little moment with open mouth, and then he shook his head impatiently.

"It is not saying one thing," he said. "It is only the splashing of water on stones that I hear."

"That is because it is not your mother," said Nadita, and her eyes sparkled. "I can hear wonderful things that she is telling to me—but I cannot tell you —they are secret things."

"But I do not mean that kind of a mother," said

Nadita smiled with delight at the great splashing Chico made.

Chico. "I mean a mother with arms, who tucks in the bed blanket things at night——"

"And who scolds?" asked Nadita quickly, with a little flash of mischief in her eyes; "and who calls out, 'Chico, have you cut the wood?—Lazy boy, you shall be spanked!'"

"Oh," said Chico sheepishly, in a very small voice, "did you hear that? That was nothing—I did other things that day—and she did not spank me"; but his interest in mothers was gone, and like a little lizard he jumped up and slipped away along the stones in the edge of the water.

"Hi!" he called back. "Listen to what the stream says now!" and Nadita smiled with delight at the great splashing he made as he waded through the water.

But he came back in a moment, breathless.

"I saw you yesterday," he said, and he spoke quickly. "Almost I forgot, and that was the thing I came to talk about—I saw you yesterday when you went over the wall. At first I thought it was a thing my eyes told lies about—I did not know how you could climb like that—but when I came close I saw that the stones were rough and made step places—

but why do you go to that garden place, and what do you do there?"

"I did not see *you*," said Nadita, and the pink came into her cheeks, "I looked to see that no one was near—not ever do I go in if I think there are those who see—I did not see you."

It was time now for the face of Chico to grow red, and he looked down in confusion.

"I was behind a bush," he said. "I thought if you saw me you would not go and I wanted to see where it was that you went."

"Did you follow up over the wall?" asked Nadita. "Did you see on the other side?"

Chico grew redder still, but he answered bravely:

"I climbed to the top of the wall, but I did not go down!—I wanted to call you when I was on the top but I could not see you—there were only trees and leaves, and I did not know who would hear if I called. I waited a little while, but you did not come back. It has a very wonderful look—that place—I think it must be a very good place to play."

Nadita jumped up suddenly.

"Come!" she cried. "We will go there now—I will show you how it is the most wonderful place for play in all the world."

Chico did not hesitate, but followed eagerly where Nadita led.

They went along the edge of the stream for a little way, and then crossed on stones in a place where it was shallow.

The high wall of the garden came down to the very edge of the water and did not look as if any but a bird or a monkey could ever go over the top, but at one place the stones were more rough than at others, and there were little lumpy stones that stuck out far enough to make a very good hold for hands and feet. Nadita went up these as if she had done it very often, and Chico followed more slowly, for he had to choose the places where he could climb. Nadita reached the top much more quickly than he and watched him come up with a smile on her face—it was not often that a girl could do things more quickly than a boy, and it was a very good feeling. When he had reached the top they both dropped down very easily on the inside of the wall, for the garden was much higher than the stream outside.

For a little they waited breathless, to listen for anyone who might be in the garden.

"An old man comes sometimes," whispered Nadita. "He feeds the swans, and sometimes he works

with the flowers, but I think that now he is not here"; and they both walked down a wide garden path, listening carefully.

Chico looked about him with eyes of wonder, and Nadita felt very proud to show him the things that she knew so well.

The garden was *alive* this morning—more alive than Nadita had ever seen it—with little birds, whose shimmering colors flashed in the sunshine, and with flowers and whispering leaves and water that would not stay still, and floating perfumes and bending grasses. Even the sunshine danced, and little blue cloud shadows ran racing over the open, grassy spaces. Oleanders, crêpe myrtle, and magnolia trees waved bright blossoms in the sunlight, and tall eucalyptus trees rustled high above, while bougainvillea vines made great splashes of color everywhere. There were orange trees—thick-laden with their golden fruit—palms and lacy ferns and curious fruits, fringed orchids clinging to the trees like butterflies.

"This is a place of magic," said Chico, and he said it in a voice that was almost a whisper. Nadita danced before him, surely she was a part of the very garden itself. Here she lived as she did not live in other places —the pink in her cheeks was the pink of the camellia

blossoms, and the light in her eyes was the flash of sunlight on the ripply water of the swan pool.

"Come!" she cried. "There is more—very much more! Look—how the garden where the roses bloom has straight little paths, and a thing to tell the time, and a little house with seats in it! And if you have bread we can feed the swans—and down that path is a fountain with a white stone boy in it—and that path leads up to a house in a corner of the wall where you can see the snow mountains and almost all the world besides. And then—there is a secret door—you would not know that it was there at all when it is closed."

"Show me that!" cried Chico eagerly. "Where does the door lead to?"

"It is over here," said Nadita, and ran to one side of the rose garden where the path led up steeply toward the wall. There were white marble benches here, and columns that once had held statues, and under the path, where it went much higher than the head of Nadita, was a wall that was plastered in panels and once had been painted to look like marble.

"Now look," cried Nadita. "Can you see anything in that wall?"

Chico did not answer immediately, but walked up to the wall and, after examining it for a moment, rapped with his fingers on a panel that gave out a sound that was very plainly the sound of wood.

A little shadow came into the eyes of Nadita—she had hoped he would not find the secret door so quickly.

"It is because of that paint," she said then. "If that paint was not falling off, you could not see the wood."

"Listen!" said Chico suddenly. "There are men talking in the garden. Quick! Where will we go? They are coming to this place!"

Without waiting a moment, Nadita pulled on a place that looked like a carved stone rose, and a small door came open, showing a black, square hole in the wall, and before a leaf could drop to the ground, she and Chico were safe inside with the door closed behind them.

It was so dark inside that Chico felt very sure his eyes must be closed, and he put up his hand to see, but his fingers told him that they were very wide open and could see nothing at all. It was a little shivery and damp in that place, and there was a musty smell of garden mold.

Nadita put out her hand and held tight to him, and they were both trembling a little.

At first they could hear nothing at all, but in a very little while the voices of two men came to them plainly—they must have stopped just outside the little secret door.

"Do you think they will come in this place?" whispered Chico, his lips close to the ear of Nadita.

"I do not know at all," answered Nadita in the same low whisper. "Maybe they will say what they will do."

"We cannot hide anything here," said a voice very close to the wall. "This is the garden of the Padrón, himself."

"Yes, but he does not come here—no one comes here but old Miguel. It would be a very good place to hide things," said another voice, which sounded to Nadita as if she had heard it before—somewhere—but just now she could not think where it had been. "But the place I have told about," went on the voice, "is not *in* the garden—a passage leads out of the garden, and there is a cave—I think no one at all knows about it—it is a very good hiding place—even this little door is very hard to find"; and Nadita and Chico could hear a hand brush against the door.

Listen!" said the other voice then. "Someone is coming—quick!—I will not be caught like a rat in this place. We must come again at another time!" And very suddenly the men were gone.

Nadita pushed against the little door.

"I do not like this place," she said with a tremble in her voice. "I want to get away from here and not to come back again—I do not like black places."

"But wait," said Chico hurriedly. "Those men said that someone is coming."

"It must be the garden man," said Nadita. "Very much I would rather see him than to stay in this place. Let us go, Chico," and she pushed open the door.

There was no one at all in sight, and they could not hear a sound of anyone on any path.

"Maybe they are hiding somewhere," said Chico, "or maybe they went out of the garden."

"Let us go back quickly," said Nadita, and she thought that behind every tree she could see those men watching. "Those were bad men—only men who steal things talk words like that," said Nadita, "and one man"—suddenly her eyes grew big and black with thought, always they looked like that when her thoughts were very big—"one man," she said slowly,

"had the voice of a man that I know very well. Many times have I heard that voice, but not *ever* did I think that he would steal things."

They walked as quickly as possible back to the place where they had climbed into the garden, and always Nadita had the eyes of one who was thinking very big thoughts—almost she forgot to have fear of those men.

It was a strange thing that had come into her thoughts, and she felt that she could not go quickly enough back to the home place to see if it was a true thing.

She remembered that night when the shadow had come to the door of the house of Pancho. She had thought then that very much the shadow looked like the husband of Tia, but that was a thought she had quickly put out of her mind, for, though he drank much pulque and said things that were loud and ugly and would break things and kick at the little ones, she did not think—not *ever*—that he would steal. That was a very terrible thing—to steal. But now it was different—the voice in the garden *was* the voice of the husband of Tia—and only men who stole things could talk like that. And if he *did* steal things—*this* was the big thought, the one that made her to walk

fast—if he *did* steal things and he knew about that little skin bag of Pancho—— "Oh!"—Nadita had said the word out loud and Chico looked at her strangely—"We must get back *quickly*—I must see if it is true!"

"What is true?" asked Chico in a puzzled voice, but then his face changed very suddenly. "Look!" he cried. "There are Juan and Pedro—we will tell them about the garden and what we saw."

But Nadita ran ahead of him to where the two boys were waiting under the big tree of Pancho.

"Have you"— she cried breathlessly—"have you seen the husband of Tia this day?"

"No," they answered in surprise. "We have not seen *him*, but Tia we have seen, and she has a very sad look on her face—she cries all the time. They say that he drinks very much pulque, and they say, too, that he steals. He does not come home any more."

The look that came into the face of Nadita they could not understand at all.

"What is it?" cried Juan. "Why do you look like that?"

"Wait!" said Nadita in a voice that was as strange as the look in her face, and she ran to the little house

of Pancho, and with a very quick-beating heart she moved away the little jar that hung in front of the black hole in the wall——

THE HOLE WAS EMPTY! The little skin bag of Pancho was gone!

CHAPTER VII

WHERE IS NADITA?

The day is gone, and all the golden light
  Has faded, even from the tallest tree;
A shiny yellow star comes into sight
  And sends a little twinkle straight to me.

JUST for a moment, when Nadita looked at that little empty place where the money bag of Pancho had been, she felt that the whole world was a big black thing that went round and round—and no thoughts would come—and when they did come, it was not any better.

What would Pancho do now—with no money at all? Dear, kind Pancho, who only did good things and who had to buy food to eat. What would happen to him when he was old and could not make jars to sell?

These were very big thoughts, and the heart and the mind of Nadita ached with them, and a hard little lump place came into her throat—a place that would not swallow away.

She could not tell Pancho—always she told everything to Pancho—but now he was not here and he had not said when he would come back, and the boys could not help. What would Pancho do—what *could* he do if he was here? That was a good thought and might bring other thoughts.

What *would* Pancho do? First—maybe he would think—"Who took that bag?" That was a plain thing—the answer to that would come quickly—"The husband of Tia took that bag—it *must* be that he took it. He was the one who came that night—and he was in the garden with another man." Her heart began to beat more quickly. Would Pancho go and try to get the bag away from the husband of Tia?

She could not do that—surely she could not do that—he would not give it to her. But, if she promised not to tell anybody who it was who took things—and if she would give him something for the bag—then, maybe——! Oh, but if she waited here, the men would be gone from the garden, and then maybe never could she find them. She must go *now*. She had a great fear of those men—so great that she trembled at the very thought of seeing them again—but she *must* get the little bag of Pancho back again—something very terrible would happen to Pancho if she

did not get it back. And then came another thought —the men would want her to give them something for the bag, and she did not have anything—not anything that would sell for money—except——! A sudden thought made her open her eyes very wide—it was a hurt thought—but that did not matter now. Pancho had said that Poco was a very fine dog, and the lady at the big house would give money for him —maybe the men would give back the little bag for Poco. She tried not to think what she would do without Poco—she must *not* think about that—it was Pancho who was the one to think about now—Pancho who could not live without money to buy food.

Poco was sitting in the room looking up at her—all the time he had been there, and a wonder was in his eyes to see Nadita stand for so very long still. She tried not to look at him—this was a thing that must be done very quickly, or the men would be gone from the garden—maybe now they were gone—and she stooped and wrapped Poco in the little scarf thing that she wore always on her head, and picked him up in her arms.

The three boys were talking down by the stream, she could see them through the door, and she waited

until they looked the other way, and then she crept back of the house so they could not see her go, and ran along the little stream to the shallow place where she could cross. The wall of the garden hid her now from the sight of the boys, and she hugged Poco tight in her arms. He was very heavy to run with, but the truly hard part came when she climbed the wall with him. For a little, she thought she could not do it at all, until she thought to tie the scarf around her shoulders and to carry Poco on her back just as the women carried the little babies—and just like a baby Poco lay there and let her do just what she wanted with him. This was a new game they were playing, and he thought it was very nice to be with Nadita and not to have to use his legs—for Poco *was* lazy.

When they reached the top of the wall, Nadita held with her fingers and only let her eyes come to the top—there was no sound at all. Were those men gone? She did not know which would be the more terrible thing—to see them there or to find that they were gone. Her little hands trembled so that they could hardly hold to the wall, and her eyes were like big, shining stars.

It did not seem that ever the garden had been so quiet. Nadita slipped over the wall and crept softly

down the walks toward the garden where the roses were, and she listened and looked so eagerly that she felt all eyes and ears.

Not anyone was anywhere. The little birds sang in the trees, and the flowers nodded at her as if nothing at all had happened, but Nadita felt as if all the world was a very different place from what it had ever been before.

She walked softly to the little secret door place and listened—but there was not even a tiny sound. She opened the door and tried to see down the passage, but still she could see nothing. Had they come this way and gone down that passage? she wondered. And then a new thought almost made her give a jump—the bag was a very *little* thing—maybe they would drop it! Maybe, *now*, it was somewhere inside that passage. She put her head in a little farther—it was so dark and scary, but if the door were left open she could see a little way—and far down the passage was a broken place where some daylight came in. For just a *little* way she would go, and then, if she found nothing, she would come back.

Poco stirred and poked his little cold nose into the back of her neck—it was good to feel that he was there—Nadita did not feel so alone.

She stepped into the passage and walked a little way, very slowly, looking carefully on the ground. A sharp little bang made her jump suddenly and give a cry, but it was only the little secret door, and it must have been the wind that closed it, for there was no other sound. Just in front of her was the broken place in the passage where light came in, and underneath that place she saw something that looked—very *much* it looked like a little bag.

Nadita hardly knew what happened after that—she stumbled and slid down a slanting place and then she fell a short distance and landed in a little heap on the hard stone. But she was not hurt—she felt herself carefully all over to see—no, she was not hurt—but for a little she had a great wonder where she could be.

* * * * * * *

Chico, Juan, and Pedro grew impatient, after a little while, when Nadita did not come out of the house. Always when they came to this place they would play games and have races, and Nadita would play just as a boy did, and she could think of more new things than they could think of, and for to-day they had planned a game that was played with sticks and little stones—but Nadita did not come, even

when they called to her she did not come—and no word came from the little house.

"Where *is* Nadita?" asked Juan. "I think it is a strange thing that she does not answer when we call."

And just then old Pancho came home—they could hear him singing softly to himself as he crossed on the stones of the stream.

"Hi!" he called as he saw the boys. "Have you heard the thing they talk about in the town? Here is a great chance to grow rich, and should be a very simple thing for adventurers such as you."

The boys crowded close about him.

"Tell us," they cried. "What do they say in the town?"

"It is a big prize," he answered, and smiled down on them with his kindly eyes, "a prize for stolen things. There has been a thief in town—it may be there is more than one—and many things have been stolen. The prize is for the one who can tell where these things are to be found—or maybe for the return of them."

The eyes of Chico were suddenly bright, and he drew his breath to speak.

"But where is Nadita?" asked Pancho then. "See

how I have brought her a little bag of nuts," and he looked about him—but not even Poco was there.

"Where has she gone?" he asked then, and Pedro answered:

"She asked about the husband of Tia—and when we told her that he drank very much pulque and that someone says that he steals—a very queer look came into her face, and she walked quickly into the house —your house, there—and we have not seen her come out again, so she must be there now."

But Nadita was not in the house. Pancho stood at the door and saw very quickly that she was not there, for there was nothing in the small place behind which she could hide, and she was not in the little room that was hers—she was not anywhere at all!

The boys looked at each other in a great surprise outside of the door of the little house.

"But how could she go anywhere that we could not see?" cried Juan. "All the time, we were right here."

"It must have been when you told of that game," said Chico thoughtfully. "We looked only at you— and we did not see her go. But maybe she will be back in a little—and Poco is with her."

But there was a look of trouble in the face of Pancho.

"There is something here that is strange," he said. "Always she waits until I come home"; and then his eyes went to the wall of his room where hung the many little jars. "What was that thing about the husband of Tia—who steals?" and without waiting to hear the answer, he walked very slowly to the wall and pushed aside the jar that hung in front of the black hole. For a little he stood very still and looked at the empty place, and there was a frown of thought on his face, and then he walked to the door of the room and out to the grassy place under the tree, but he did not speak to anyone.

For a while the boys, all three of them, waited for Nadita under the tree with old Pancho, but when she did not come back and Pancho would not talk, Pedro spoke:

"I will go for a little way into the town and see if Nadita comes now"; and Juan rose quickly to go with him, but Chico thought suddenly of the garden, and though the very thought of it made him to have a big fear that those two strange men might still be there, he decided to go and see if Nadita had returned to the place she loved so well.

Pancho still did not speak when they all went away, but he nodded his head at them, and it was plain to see that his mind was filled with trouble thoughts.

Chico ran down the side of the stream until he came to the place that he now knew well, and carefully climbed the wall where he and Nadita had come in the afternoon, and after a long look around, and listening intently at the top of the wall, he dropped softly into the garden.

There was no sound except the wind in the trees and the sleepy sounds that birds make when the day is drawing toward evening, for it was very late in the afternoon, and already the pink light of sunset was touching the tops of the highest trees.

Chico walked slowly down a broad walk that led away from the wall, and it seemed to be the way he had come before, that one other time. The trees grew thicker and thicker, and there were little rustly sounds about him that made him jump when they came suddenly. Chico did not fear things that he could see out in the open sunlight, but in this strange place he did not know what might happen, and the sounds were not the sounds that he knew.

There was no little sign that Nadita had come here, and he did not dare to call for her aloud. How

strange that she should come to this place to play—it did not seem a place of magic as it had seemed when she was with him—he would not come to a place like this. He liked the stream that splashed and laughed as it ran over the stones, and the warm dust of the streets and open roads, and the wide, grassy place of the old alameda—but this was so very quiet and whispery. Around every tree there seemed to be eyes watching him, and fluttering wings in the bushes, and the sunlight was not big and yellow as it was outside, but pale green in some places and in others it dropped rosy through the trees like falling flower petals.

There! That was a step! Someone was coming along one of the garden paths; and Chico stopped, with his heart beating high in his throat. He stepped behind a thick, dark bush and waited, hardly daring to take one breath.

A very old man came down the path, mumbling to himself, and just as he came to the bush where Chico was hiding, he stopped and seemed to hesitate, and then he stood a hoe up against a tree opposite and walked back the way he had come.

Chico stood very still for a little, and then he came out from behind his bush. He did not fear now. The

Chico struck the snake so that it lay still.

man must be the old gardener Nadita had said came to this place sometimes, and surely it would be very easy to keep where he could not see.

A very queer little movement in the grass at his feet made Chico to look down quickly, and a small green snake wriggled toward the path where the old man had been. Chico jumped from his bush and across the path, and almost with one movement took the hoe in his hand and struck the snake so that it lay still. He heard the old man coming back on the path and just had time to hide again behind the big bush when he was there.

The man stopped at the snake and made a queer little noise in his throat, and then he looked sharply around.

"Santa Maria!" he said, under his breath. "Many times I have thought there were spirits in this place —and now, see, how this is proof! And they have taken my hoe"—Chico had not had time to put it down—"Ai—ee, what shall I do now? It is a very bad sign—and I cannot work without a hoe." He bent down then and seemed to look more closely at the snake. "But this spirit has done a thing that is very bad—bad for *him!*" and he made clucking noises with his tongue. "He has made a mistake—and it is

strange how a spirit could make a mistake like that." Chico pushed a little forward through the bush that he might see the more clearly at what the old man looked so steadily, but he could see only the snake that lay in the soft dirt of the pathway, and he listened to the words that came then, with eyes grown very big he listened.

"Ai—ee—but this is a terrible thing," and the old man shook his head dolefully. "See—how he has cut the magic mark on the neck—not ever can that spirit make a sound again with his mouth!" and Chico felt a cold shiver go down his back. Could that be a true thing—what the old man had said? And then—just because he could not help it—he *had* to try and see if it was a true thing—he made a little noise with his mouth—just a very *little* noise—but he nearly jumped out of his skin at the great laugh that came then from the pathway.

"Come out!" cried the old man. "Come out—spirit that hides behind bushes! And do not try ever again to fool an old man who still has eyes in his head."

"How did you know I was behind that bush?" said Chico, coming out with a very red face to stand in front of the old man.

"How could I help knowing?" said the man, still laughing and pointing with his finger to the prints of little bare feet in the soft dirt of the pathway—feet that ran out and then back again to the bush. The old man stopped laughing then and looked at Chico very gravely.

"How does it come that you are in this garden—where no one comes? Is it to steal fruit that you come?"

"No," answered Chico slowly, "I came to find a—a friend of mine."

"So—then there are others here!"

"Yes," answered Chico then, "and to-day two men came to your garden—men who had the talk of thieves—we heard them—they came to hide something."

The eyes of the old man opened very wide at that, and he looked about him in some alarm.

"We must speak to the Padrón and to the gendarmes [police] about this—it will not do that others come to this garden, this is a private place and will have to be guarded. Where is your friend?—and tell him to go quickly out of here. This time I will not punish—if no harm is done and you go quickly—but do not come again, you or your friend."

"My friend is a little girl, and I think she is lost," said Chico. "I think she is somewhere in this garden, but I am not sure."

"Oh," said the old man, and he looked at Chico queerly. "Then come—see how it grows dark—we must find her quickly, or she will stay lost all night."

Even while they had been talking, the night had come down on the garden. Chico wondered at how quickly it had come—one moment he could see things very plainly, and then, as if a door had been shut on the sun, it was black dark, and things began to move and make strange sounds about them.

"What is the name of your friend?" asked the old man. "We will call her."

But only bird cries and flutterings came back in answer to the call for "Nadita"!

They were walking rather quickly on paths that Chico could not see when very suddenly he stopped and gave a cry.

"Come!" he cried. "I cannot move! Look how we are on the edge of a very high place—there is sky everywhere!"

But the old man only laughed more loudly than he had laughed that other time.

"That is water that you see," he said, "and you

will not fall in, for there is an edge of stone. I think you have not come often here with your friend, then."

"Only one time have I ever been in this place, and that one time was this day," answered Chico, and as he stopped speaking, a very strange noise came from somewhere, and a cold feeling crept up the back of his neck. Even the old man stood very still, and his breath came with a sharp little hiss.

"What is that?" he said in a whisper. "Never have I heard that sound!"

Chico came close to him and caught him by the arm. Then it came again—and it was not like any sound of earth things.

"Let us go—out of this place," said Chico, and almost his teeth were chattering. "Let us go—quickly!"

"It must be some animal," said the old man. "We must find what it is. If you have fear, you will wait here and I will go."

"Oh, no," said Chico, and he was glad the old man could not see his face. "I will stay with you—but I wish—I wish there was a light."

"We will get a light," said the man. "There is one not far from here—come. Hi! But there is that noise again."

And through the lonely garden—through the black dark—came that sound—like a howl and a wail—but far, far away, as if from the place where no living things are.

And Chico followed the old man, but his heart was in his mouth!

CHAPTER VIII

POCO TALKS

When night is here, the whole world is a different place—
The trees lift branches to the very sky;
And soft wings gently brush against my face—
As things I cannot see go rustling by.

IT WAS a little better in the garden when there was a light. The old man got a lantern from a place in a very tumble-down summerhouse, and its beam of yellow light made a wavering pathway through the night. But great shadows moved now in every direction, and Chico felt that many eyes were watching from beyond the shadows.

The old man did not look to be afraid, but there was a puzzled frown on his forehead, and in the hand that was not carrying the lantern he took the hoe, after weighing it carefully, and pointed to a heavy stick beside the path for Chico to take. It made Chico feel better to carry the stick and to swing it through the air in defiance of the thing that might come.

And now, when the sound came again, they listened more carefully that they might tell the direction in which to go.

"It might be a dog," said the old man thoughtfully. "There is the sound of a dog howling—in a shut-up place."

Like a flash came a light into the eyes of Chico—how strange that he had not thought of that before—Poco—it must be Poco howling.

"It is the little dog of my friend calling," said Chico, with a great relief in his voice. "It is Poco, and where Poco is, is Nadita. Come, let us find them."

"Why did you not say before that there is a dog?" said the old man, and was it possible that a relief sounded in his voice also? "Come, now, there is only to find where he is."

And then another thought came to Chico. Had not the old man said that the sound came from a shut-up place?

"The secret-door place," he cried. "The little door that is in the wall of the rose garden."

"What do you know about that place?" asked the old man quickly. "It is strange that you know so much about this garden."

"I told you only one time I have been here," answered Chico. "But let us go quickly. If that is Poco crying, it may be that he is hurt or Nadita is hurt."

The old man began to mumble under his breath, but he walked quickly now, and very soon they came to the little door in the wall, and from there the sound was very plain, and it was just on the other side of the door.

The old man pulled it open, and the lantern light shone full on Poco, for it was truly Poco who had howled, and he was very glad to see them, but he would not come out of the door, and Nadita was not there.

High above his head the old man held his lantern and looked down the long, dark passage that seemed to go on and on endlessly.

"She is not here—your friend is not in this place," he said then. "I do not know how the dog came to be here—but look, how you can see very plainly that the passage is empty."

Poco ran a little way down the passage and looked back at them with anxious eyes.

"Where does this place go?" asked Chico, but the old man shrugged his shoulders.

"There are those who say it goes for many leagues —under the hills—I do not know. My legs are too old to carry me far—I have not tried to see."

Poco barked sharply then, and there seemed to be an answer far down the passage.

"She is there!" cried Chico. "Maybe she has a hurt"; and, without another word, the old man followed him with his lantern as he ran down the passage with Poco always running ahead.

"Hi!" called the old man then. "Do not go so fast. I cannot follow, and besides, there are broken places—it may be you will fall."

"Here!" cried Chico, with a shout. "Here is where she is," and a voice was answering him—but the old man frowned with wonder, for he saw no one. And then the light of his lantern showed a black hole in the floor where blocks of stone had fallen in.

"Oh, how I am glad you have come!" cried a little voice from down in that hole, and there was the sound of tears in the voice. "How it has been long."

"Have you a hurt?" asked Chico anxiously.

"No, I have no hurt," answered Nadita, "but it is very black in this place," and the voice trembled more than before. "And I have not found anything or anybody—not even that little bag have I found. I put

Poco up to call for someone to come here and to help me, and he did call—but—but—it has been very long," and a sob finished her words.

Afterward, Chico could not remember very clearly how Nadita had got out of the big, black hole—in some way the old man had helped with the hoe—but the important thing was that, very soon, she was standing in the passage with them, and Poco was barking and jumping with delight—and then—the lantern had made a spluttering noise and had gone out, leaving them in a blackness that was very complete.

"Have a care!" cried the old man. "Have a care that you do not fall again into that hole, either one of you—and you, boy, take hold of the loose of my coat and go slowly—back the way we have come. Ai—ee, go slowly—for I, myself, feel as blind as a bat in this place."

And so they felt their way back, very cautiously, to the little door in the rose garden. Even Poco was quiet for a little, and that is why, when they reached the door, someone who stood outside in the garden had heard no noise and spoke in a low voice that could be heard only a little way.

"Is that you, Bartolo?" said the voice.

Chico and Nadita had no fear at the very first when he spoke, for were they not with the one who had a right to be in the garden? And his name might very well be Bartolo, for all they knew, but when the old man reached back and pushed them again into the passage, they knew that all was not well, and Nadita caught tight hold of the hand of Chico.

The old man pressed closely against them, and Poco sniffed into the night air, and then he gave a little growl.

"Who is that?" cried a voice quickly then, and more loudly than before, and there was a sharp word from another voice, and then the sound of running feet that died quickly away in the garden—and Poco barked very furiously, but Nadita held him tight.

"It was the two men," she cried excitedly then. "I did not think that quick enough—the very two men that I came to see. Oh, catch them—please catch them—they have that little bag of Pancho's."

There was a grunt from the old man.

"They are gone now," he said, "and I am glad they are gone—but this is a very bad thing—I do not understand this. Why do those men come to this place? I shall speak to the Padrón this very night. I could not talk to those men, and I could not catch

them—see how I am old and cannot fight now (there was a time when I could fight, but not now)—and they would not listen to words from me, if they are bad men. But why"—and he turned to Nadita suddenly—"why did you come to find them—and why should I catch them?" and there was a great surprise and wonder in his voice.

"They are bad men who steal," said Nadita. "I could tell by the words that they said this day—and they took—oh"—a little wail came into her voice—"they took money from Pancho—all the money that he has!"

"Ai—ee," said the old man. "That is very bad indeed, but if you had found them, what then? And why did you think to find them in this place?"

"I thought—I thought that I could give them Poco and promise not to let anybody know about how they steal, and then—maybe—they would give me the little bag," said Nadita with a sob in her voice. "But I could not find them in the garden, and I thought maybe they had gone in the passage—they said words about the passage—but I fell in the hole—I thought it was only steps that were there—but it was a hole."

The old man was looking at the dim little figure Nadita made in the darkness of the garden, and there

was much wonder in his thoughts that so little a one could have thoughts that were so big.

"It is very good that you did not find them," he said at last. "I think they would not give you the little bag, and they might hurt you because you know how that they steal."

Nadita was still shivering, and Chico felt the tremble in her little body.

"Pancho is waiting," he said, suddenly remembering that that was true. "He will have many thoughts of trouble for you, and it is late—we must go."

"Come, then," said the old man. "I do not know how you came into the garden, but you will go out by the gate, and then I will speak to the Padrón and to the gendarmes also—they must know of this"; and speaking more words that they could not hear, under his breath, he led them out of the garden by a way that Nadita had not gone before.

Chico had never known Nadita to be so quiet, and when they came near to the place where she lived, he saw that she was still trembling, but he did not speak —something told him that this was a time when to speak would not be good.

Pancho was still sitting under the big tree. By the glow of the little charcoal fire, they saw him, and he

looked up as they came, and smiled with a glad smile to see Nadita, but she went down quickly on the ground by his side and took one of his hands in her two little ones. Chico could see that the big tears were rolling down her cheeks.

"Only bad things—always bad things have come to you while I am here," she sobbed. "I—I think I must go to some other place."

"Hi!" said Pancho, and there was a deep feeling in his voice. "What is this that you say? Only *good* has come to Pancho while you are here, my Little Nothing."

"Oh, but you do not know the very worst thing of all. That little bag—the money that was to be for you when you are old—that little bag—" and the voice went into a sad wail of grief—"it—it is gone!"

"Poof!" said Pancho, "what do I care for that little bag! Let it go. But you must not cry for that, Little Nothing—you did not make it to go."

She looked up at him with wide eyes—this was not what she had thought he would say, and there was still a smile in his eyes. This was a very strange thing.

"No," she said in a wondering voice, "I did not make it to go—but what will you do without any money?"

"Ah! That is very different," said old Pancho, and nodded with a very knowing look. "Without money maybe we could not live, but that is different. Pancho is old, but Pancho is not foolish in the head. Look at this"—and from the inside of his shirt he brought out a little bag that was not made of skin, but a little bag that looked to be heavy with what it contained, and that jingled very comfortably with the sound of money. "See this?" he said again, and he shook the bag a very little. "That night when you saw the shadow pass by the doorway of my house and the Padrón, too, saw a shadow—that very night I hid the money away in another place, but I left the little bag of skin behind the jar so that, if the shadow came again, it would not have a great feeling of disappointment."

"And what was in the little skin bag?" asked Nadita, and altogether the sob sounds had gone away from her voice.

"In that little bag"—said Pancho, and he leaned over and patted her shiny black head very gently—"in that bag were very nice little stones. And now, see, my Nadita, how it is *good* that you have brought me always, for if you had not seen the man at the

doorway, I would not have hidden the money in another place—and maybe, now, it would not be here."

"Oh," breathed Nadita, and there was a great relief and happiness in her voice, "oh, how I am glad."

And then Pancho had to be told all that had happened that day, and as they spoke a light of interest came into his eyes.

"That makes me to think of a place I heard of one time. That place that you fell into," he said, "maybe it was like that."

"It was very dark," said Nadita. "I did not like it —not *ever* would I go into a place like that again."

"But you went this time for a thing to help me," said Pancho, and his voice was very thoughtful and gentle, and then, for a little, he did not speak; but, after a while, a sparkle came into his eye. "But this other place, I think you would like," he said. "Listen to this—it was my grandfather who told this to me, and a very old man had told it to him. In that long, long ago when a people strange to us lived in this land, when there were great stone houses and kings and high temples, it is said that a white palace—a house for kings—stood in the place where are now only trees and bushes growing. It was filled with gold,

that palace, and many other things that count for treasure, and outside of the city, many leagues from the palace, was another one where the king lived in the summer time. Between the palace in the city and the one outside was a great roadway where anyone could travel in the daylight and in the open, but for the king—when there was war or other reason—there was a secret way. A way built under the ground, and no one knew of this way but the king and those who were very close to him. Then men came who took the king from his palace and conquered all his people and made them to work like slaves. But much of the treasure that was in the palace of the king they did not find. For many years they looked for it, and at one time they dragged with nets on the bottom of the lake, thinking to find it there, but they could not find it. They did not know about the secret way of the king, but others knew of that way and searched for it, thinking that there they might find the treasure; but even the secret way was lost, and all had been killed who knew where it was—and to this very day it has not been found. That is what my grandfather said."

The eyes of Nadita and of Chico were very large in the light of the little fire and even in that dim glow

could be seen the spots of excitement that grew on the cheeks of Nadita.

"Oh, how I would like to find that way!" she cried. "How many things we could buy if we could find a treasure like that!"

Chico was even more excited than Nadita.

"If I could find a treasure," he cried, "I would buy that pony that always I have wanted—and a suit of clothes with silver buttons on it that jingle when I walk."

Nadita clapped her hands. "I would buy a great house for Pancho—and for Tia a place for the little ones—*all* of the little ones to stay."

Pancho was smiling.

"And what would I do with a great house?" he asked. "This tree is the house that I love. But if there was any secret way from the garden of the Padrón, long ago they would have found it—and we would have no more than just what we have now."

"Oh," said Nadita, and there was a little weary sound to her voice, "but it would be very nice to find a thing like that."

Pancho looked at her suddenly.

"And what did you have for your supper?" he questioned.

Nadita gave a little cry.

"Not *any* supper did I have," she said, "and not any dinner; inside I am all hollow and dried up like a little gourd."

"And *I* did not have any supper," said Chico, and he looked very carefully away from the big pot that he saw was on the little charcoal fire. "I think I will go home now."

Pancho did not say anything, but he raised the lid of that pot that was on the little charcoal fire, and out of it came a steamy smell—a *very* good smell. Pancho stirred what was in the pot, and better and better grew the smell. Then he reached for a little pile of tortillas that were warming on a clean, flat stone, and, with a quick twist of his hand, he made cornucopias of two of them, and again he leaned over the pot.

Nadita and Chico came nearer and nearer to the glow of the fire, and Nadita tried not to smack her lips, but it was very hard, and not once did either of them take their eyes from the thing that Pancho was doing—and not again did Chico say that he would go home.

CHAPTER IX

A BIG PLAN

A little sunbeam sang a song,
To shadows all—sang he—
"Come out, and we will have a race!
Come out—come out—to me!"
But they the closer snugly sat,
Within their houses dim,
And when he'd finished all his song
They straightway answered him:
"We will not come—we will not come,"
They sang, as loud as he;
"For if we lost—or if we won—
Oh, then, where would we be!"

VERY early the next morning, when first the sun began to send his golden shower down through the leaves and the little birds to tune up for their morning song in the big tree, Nadita heard a sound outside that was not the sound of birds and was not the quiet moving of Pancho or the rustly morning dance of the leaves, and Poco barked very excitedly when he heard the sound, and scratched at the door to get out.

Nadita blinked her eyes for a moment to drive the

sleep thoughts away, and then she jumped up from her little mat bed, and a funny little smile came to her face.

"Come out, Lazy-head," said a voice that she knew very well. "Look how the sun is up, and for long *we* have been up, and this is to be a day of very great things. Come quickly, we have much to tell you!"

When Chico called like that, it meant always some new game to play or a place to go. There were many places to go, and boys very often thought of nice things to play—so her heart began to beat quickly with excitement—she gave a little pat to the folded blanket of her bed and smoothed the shiny black of her hair and gave a little shake to her skirts. Later she would find a tiny, still pool among the rocks in the singing stream, and she would wash her face—for always she liked the clean feel that it gave to her—but now there was not time for that, and she ran to the door. Poco, like a little cork out of a bottle, popped out when the door was open.

There stood the three boys—Chico, Juan, and Pedro—with eyes as bright as old Father Sun himself, and they were fairly hopping with excitement.

"Oh, there is so much to tell," cried Chico. "We

thought never you would come out. We have talked and talked ever since it was black dark. Pedro, Juan, and I—*all* of us think that that place in the garden of the Padrón is maybe the secret way of the king that Pancho told about—and we want to go there and see if there is a treasure."

The heart of Nadita sank like a little piece of lead. The thought of treasure was a very nice thought, and a very exciting one, but to go again into that terrible black place was a thing that she could not do.

"Oh, no!" she cried. "I would not go in that place again—it has holes and maybe snakes, and I think there is nothing good there at all. If there was treasure there," she said suddenly, "those thief men would have found it."

"No," said Juan eagerly. "We thought about that, and if they had found it they would not have to steal things like they do now—they would be very rich."

"Well, you can go and hunt," said Nadita, "but me, I will not go in that black place another time," and she gave a little shiver at the thought.

When they spoke to Pancho about it, he only shook his head and laughed at them.

"It was a very great while ago that my grandfather spoke of that place," he said. "Maybe it was only a tale he told—a tale of old men—and besides, very many old gardens have passages, and why should you think this one is the secret way of the king?"

"Anyway, we can find if it is not," said Pedro. "That will do no great harm—we can go there and see if there is any treasure."

Nadita was disappointed. Very much she had hoped there was to be a new game for to-day—there was a feeling in her feet and in her heart that did not want to keep still, and that did not like at *all* the thought of black, dark places with holes in them. Up overhead the little clouds went sailing in the sky, and the sunbeams danced everywhere, and the birds and the bubbling stream and the dust clouds and even the little breeze brought secret messages from far away and then flew back again to find new things—and the inside of Nadita was like that—dancing with all the things that danced.

"I will show you a new game," she cried then, to the boys. "I have a game that Pancho has taught to me, and it is a very good one—even boys would like it."

But not any great interest would they show. They

were very greatly excited at the thought of what they might find in that dark passage place and not anything else would they think of now.

Old Pancho stirred at his great iron pot. Very good things could Pancho make in that iron pot—things that tasted even better than they smelled when you were very, very hungry. He could make a stew of a little of this and a little of that and roll it up in a tortilla—a stew that could make you wriggle with a great desire the next time you were hungry and remembered it—a stew that would make Poco howl with hunger at the very smell of it, and lick his chops in great content at the last tiny bit. Only the rattle of the spoon on the bottom of the iron pot was ever the signal to stop eating when Pancho called to come —and now he called to them and lifted the top from the great iron pot.

For a little there was no talk of anything at all, and only when Poco lay down with a little grunt and put his head on his two paws and gave a sigh of deep content did the boys again think of that secret way and what might be there.

"Let us go now," cried Chico, and jumped to his feet with a shine in his eyes.

Pancho frowned a little. "Do not do a foolish

thing," he said. "You must not go in the garden of the Padrón. Besides, there will be gendarmes there and they would catch you and put you in a prison—that is a very bad place to be."

"Just let us look over the wall," said Pedro. "We could see then if there are gendarmes. Maybe they have found the place now."

"Yes, let us look over the wall," said Juan. "Never have I seen in that garden place—and I have heard very many things about it. Show us the place where we can climb up the wall and look over, Nadita."

Nadita hesitated. Just to show them the garden place was very different. It was a place she loved very much and it gave her a glad feeling to have others love it, too.

"If you do not go in," nodded Pancho, "there can be no harm to that. Even the gendarmes could not take you if you did only that. But have a great care that you do not do more than that."

And, like a bunch of little pebbles thrown from the hand, the four children were off. Very seldom did they walk anywhere. There was something that would not let them walk, it was a dancy feeling that said, "Look how everything else is dancing—how can you go slow?" Only when they walked out in the fields

did they go slowly, for there were so many things to discover there—tiny flowers that grew close to the ground under the taller ones, and little animals that hid under low bushes or shot down into holes that had to be looked for very carefully—or strange-shaped bits of stone that glittered in the sunlight, or grasses that could be braided into beautiful things—no, it was not good to go fast when you were walking in the fields or by the little stream, but when there was some place to go—*then* was the time to go fast, and this was a time like that. And all of Nadita was glad to have the wind in her face and the smell of orange blossoms and magnolia and jasmine blow from the garden, and to feel the ground slip by under her little bare feet.

Very cautiously they climbed up the rough places on the wall—for who could tell who might be just on the other side? The thought of gendarmes gave them a little tingly fear feeling that was not altogether unpleasant.

Nadita was the first to look over—but there was only the soft, rustly quiet of the garden, and no sound of anybody at all.

The boys looked over with eyes wide with curiosity and excitement, but Pedro spoke quickly, after one

quick look around, and there was a little tone of disappointment in his voice.

"There are no gendarmes here," he said. "I do not believe there are any in this place at all. Look how we can see almost the whole garden place, and there is no one here."

Nadita answered with a little scorn in her voice.

"Hardly one tiny little bit of the garden can you see from this place. All the gendarmes in this town could be in this garden, and maybe you would not see them—it is miles and miles big—this garden."

"Show us just one little bit of it," begged Juan. "I can see from here a marble man—and a little house. I think there are no gendarmes here—show us just a little bit of the garden, Nadita."

Nadita hesitated again—it is a very dangerous thing to hesitate—always something happens. Pancho had said not to go any place but on the wall—but maybe that was because he thought that there would be gendarmes—and now there did not seem to be any. Surely there could be no harm in just walking in the garden where no one came—in showing all the beautiful things that she loved so well.

"If I show you," she said, "will you be very quiet and go only where I go?"

"Oh, yes," they answered, "we will do that, and if anyone comes we will run fast to this place."

"Come, then," said Nadita, and slipped down into the garden, and the boys followed so quickly they were on the ground as soon as she was.

And Nadita was pleased that they liked the garden very much. Chico, too, would show them things that he had seen, and when they came to the pool where the swans were floating like things that are carved out of white marble, the boys had no words to tell of the wonder that was in them.

"And there is the rose garden," said Nadita. "And on one side of that garden is the little——" She stopped; for a moment she had forgotten about that black passage and what the boys had said, and she did not want to remember it again. But they remembered it—not for a moment had they forgotten—and when she pointed to the place, they began to talk eagerly.

"That is the place that we want to see more than any other place. Come—we are so close to it, you can show us very easily."

"Oh, no!" cried Nadita. "I will not show you that place."

"Hush!" said Chico quickly. "Look, there is a

gendarme down that little path—I saw how his coat is blue and he has shiny buttons—but he is not looking this way. Quick, let us go in the little door before he comes."

"No—no!" said Nadita in a whisper of sharp alarm. "We will go the way we have come. We will go back to the wall—*now!*"

"He will see us," said Chico. "He will surely see us if we go that way again. Look how he has turned and is looking that way—there is one place where there are no bushes, and—— Someone *else* is coming —look!"

There was nothing else to do. All of Nadita cried out against going again into that little black passage, but there was nothing else to do. She was sorry now that she had come into the garden at all—Pancho had said not to come, and she had not minded Pancho. *Always* something happened if you did not mind—something very bad. And this might be a *very* bad thing. Even if no one saw them going in, how were they to come out again if gendarmes were in the garden keeping watch? Oh, if only she had minded Pancho—but now was too late to think that. They slipped across the open space and into the little door like shadows.

The gendarme did not turn, he was watching someone else who came up the path—someone who made a great jingling with something he held in his hand.

The heart of Nadita beat so quickly when she closed the little door that she hardly could breathe. It was dark with the door shut, just as she knew it would be—with the faint gray light far away down the passage. She knew well that place where the light came in, and always she shivered to think of it—of the long hours that had seemed to have no end when she waited there in the night for someone to come.

The boys were very close to her, listening at the little door. This was for them a new kind of game, and there was great excitement in it. They had no great fear of the gendarmes, for they had done no wrong thing that could make the gendarmes to take them away. But Juan spoke a thought that came suddenly to his mind, and then they all thought very differently.

"If they found us in this place—those gendarmes," he whispered, "they would think we are the men who steal."

"Listen!" said Nadita. "They are coming *here*," and she drew back quickly from the door. The jingly sound they had heard and the men's voices stopped

right outside the little door, and now they could hear the words very plainly, and there was a grating sound in the little door.

"If there are thieves who come to this place," said a voice, and they knew it to be the voice of old Miguel, the garden man, "if there are thieves, I do not like that they should be hiding here." Nadita gave a little gasp, but the boys did not dare to breathe. "Did you look well in the passage," said the voice again, "to see that they are not there now?"

"I looked for a long way down," said another voice that they knew must be the gendarme. "How far does that passage go, and what is at the end of it?"

"How should I know?" said old Miguel, a little crossly. "Always I am asked that thing. It goes on and on—maybe it goes into the other world, for all I know, and as for what is at the end of it—— Bah! I cannot find one to fit!" and there were more grinding noises at the door and a great deal more jingling, and now Nadita realized what the old man was doing —he was TRYING KEYS IN THE LOCK—he was trying to lock that door!

"Oh," she said, in a low voice. "We must not let him—he will lock the door—we must not let him"; but before she had said more than that, the voice of

Miguel, the garden man.

the gendarme spoke again, and his words made Nadita to be very quiet again—so quiet that she could hear the beat of her heart.

"The Padrón has told me," said the gendarme, "to take to prison anyone who is found in this garden," and he said it as if he meant to do it. "Did you hear a noise then," he added—"a noise that seemed to come from that passage?"

There was a laugh from old Miguel. He was not so cross now, for he had found a key that turned easily in the lock.

"There are always noises in this garden," he said. "But if anyone is in there"— and he gave a little bang to the secret door—"if anyone is there, I think they will stay—for the lock is big and strong."

And then very quickly—so quickly that it seemed they almost ran—the men walked away from the little door place, and the sound of their feet died away.

And then the garden was quiet—so very quiet that the sound of the wind in the trees was almost like thunder.

And Nadita wished—with *all* of her she wished—that she had minded the words of old Pancho!

CHAPTER X

THE TREASURE HUNT

Of robbers bold,
And buried gold,
  This tale does now make mention;
And heroes brave
In hidden cave
  Call loudly for attention!

"HE HAS gone," said Chico in a husky voice, though there was now no one to hear.

"And the door is locked," said Juan.

"Maybe, if we call very loudly, he will hear us yet," said Pedro, and there was a little tremble in his voice.

"But," said Nadita, and she did not let the tremble that was in every part of her to sound in her voice, "you heard what that man said—if he sees us he will put us in the prison place."

"I do not know if he would do that," said Chico, "but now is too late to find out—they have gone. I think, maybe, there is an end to this place. Maybe"—and his voice began again to have a little of

the excitement that he had lost—"maybe we *will* find that secret place, and we can see if there is a treasure there. I think it is very good that we are here." He did not sound afraid, and the others lost a little of their fear at his words.

"Look, it is not dark down that way," said Juan, pointing to where the light came in from the broken place in the top of the passage.

"But the hole is under that," cried Nadita. "You must have a great care there."

"Shall we go down there, in that hole, where it is dark, or stay up in the way where we can see a little bit?" asked Pedro. Chico was quiet for a minute to think about this, but Nadita spoke quickly.

"Not *ever* will I go down into that black dark!" she cried. "Not ever again. Maybe in this one we can find a place that is broken in the walls, where we can climb out."

"But this could not be the secret way," said Chico. "This way is not secret at all—anyone could see this way."

"I don't care," said Nadita, "I don't care at all. If there is a treasure you can go and look for it—right now you can go down into that black hole—but *I* will go where there is light!"

Chico hesitated—very plainly he wanted to look for that treasure, but he wanted, too, to be sure that Nadita was safe—but, after all, there could be nothing here that could harm her, and only a little way he would go along that passage to see where it went. Nadita could tell very easily what he was thinking—anyone could see it in the look of his face.

"I am not afraid," she said bravely, and she did not look to be afraid. Pancho had said that *always* there is a way for good things to happen if only you could *think* of that way—and no real harm had come yet. "You can go down there—all of you—and I will wait up here."

"No," said Chico, deciding suddenly. "We will go this way—where you go. Down in that hole place it would be too dark to see—maybe we would come to a hurt, and then there would be no one to have a care for you. We will go this way, and maybe, another time, we will find where that dark one goes to."

Chico did not know that this was the time when he was more like a man than at any other time before. Nadita did not know, either, but a very good feeling came into her heart, and always after that she liked Chico more; and when she told Pancho about it after-

ward he said, "That is good. Now I know that when my Little Nothing is with Chico she is safe."

After they had passed the place that was broken in, it was very easy to go along the passage, and always there was light enough to see by from holes where stones had long ago dropped down from their places in the walls or ceiling, but these places were never large enough to climb through, even if they could have reached up to them.

At one place a tree had sent long roots down through the top of the passage, and at first Nadita had thought they were snakes, but the boys laughed very much at that and showed how brave they were by going up close to the "snakes" and feeling them with their hands. But very soon Nadita could laugh back at them, for Juan cried out loudly that something was moving and came running back in the passage shaking with fright.

"It is a very large animal," he cried. "I think we must go back the way we have come"; and there was so much fear in his face that the others drew close together and trembled a little, but Nadita crept a little forward and looked carefully into the shadows, and she saw very quickly that it was a little, very fat ground hog, that was the great animal. He drew him-

self into a tight bundle of fur and tried to squeeze into a corner of the wall as they came near.

"What a terrible animal!" cried Nadita. "Look how he will eat us all if we do not go back." And it was very good to laugh in her turn and dance on the tips of her little bare toes. Juan grew very red in the face, but he pretended not to hear and not to see the very small ground hog when they passed it—but in just a little he stopped again—and they all stopped to see what it was he saw. "Is that another ground hog?" he asked, pointing, "or is it a snake that is coming up through the stone in the floor?"

Nadita shivered, but Chico walked forward carefully, and then he gave a little laugh and stooped and picked up something.

"Look at your snake!" he said, and held up the thing for them all to see.

Nadita gave a queer cry when she saw what he held. "Let me see," she said. "Look, it is the little skin bag of Pancho!" and then she was very greatly exicted. "Those men have come this way!" she cried —"those thief men—now we know there is a way to get out"; and she explained to Pedro and to Juan about the little bag and about the men—and then they did not know whether to turn back and try to

get out of the little door or to go forward and maybe meet the men who were thieves.

"We cannot get out through the little door," said Chico. "No, there are not two things we can do—we must go this way. Maybe the men will not come, and if they do come—— Look, how we are four!—And I am very strong."

"I am strong, too," said Juan. "I am not afraid, and besides, I think we will not see them."

"I hear someone," said Nadita suddenly—and the very bravest ones gave a little jump.

It was true! They could all hear someone, but it was not someone in the passage; the sound seemed to come from outside, and it did not sound like a thief sound. It was someone singing in a very high voice, with many notes that were not strong.

"It is *PANCHO!*" cried Nadita. "Listen—how it is Pancho! I have heard him sing like that many times."

"But where is he?" said Pedro, with a great wonder. "He sounds to be near."

"*PANCHO!*" cried Nadita with all the strength of her little voice, "Nadita is calling to you."

The voice stopped as if someone had put a hand on the mouth that sang, and then in a little he answered:

"I cannot see anyone at all—I cannot understand this thing. From where do you call to Pancho?" and then came a sharp little bark.

"*POCO!*" cried Nadita joyously. "Poco—come!" and then there was a great scratching in the earth outside. It was only a very small hole that led from the passage to the outside, but Chico, who had run a distance ahead, was now shouting back to them.

"Come—there is a way out! I have found it—a cave place!"

And they ran like a little pack of wild things to find the way out. Altogether they had forgotten about the thief men, and it did not matter, for they were not there—either in the passage or in the cave place.

The way out was a very simple matter. One place in the side of the passage had broken away more than at other places, and there was a small cave hollowed out of the earth—it was more like the burrow of an animal than a real cave, and had very likely been dug by men. A little hole led from the cave to outside —a hole just large enough for a man to crawl through, and it was well hidden by bushes. No one who did not know it was there would ever find it from the outside.

A little hole led from the cave to outside.

Pancho came up, panting, to where they were. He had been running, and Poco jumped and barked for joy at the sight of Nadita.

"Where have you been?" cried Pancho. "I came to this place to dig for clay, and I heard the voice come from down in the ground. Is it a game of animals that you play?"

"Oh," said Nadita, and a feeling of great shame came to her, "I did not mind what you said. I went into the garden of the Padrón, to show—to show—things—and men came and locked us in a place——"

"What is this!" cried Pancho. "Why did they lock you in?"

"They did not know we were there," explained Nadita. "We ran into a place so they would not see us, and they locked the door."

"Ah," said Pancho, and shook a puzzled head. "But how did you get out?"

"You saw that," laughed Nadita. "You saw how we got out—this was the other end of that place. We told you that there is a passage in that garden and a little door leads into it. The passage goes under the ground like a rabbit hole, and we came that way. I think now it was fun, but when we were

in there I did not like it much. Sometime we will go back and see if the secret way is there."

"Yes," said Chico eagerly. "There is a way that goes under the one that we came—I think it is the secret way that you told about."

Pancho still shook his head. "It is a strange thing," he said. "But look at this—what has Poco?"

They had not any of them noticed that, as soon as they had come out of the cave place and Poco had given a welcome to each one, he had very quickly gone back into the hole to see for himself what was there—and he had seen more than they had seen! The floor of the cave had a very queer smell for Poco. He sniffed all over it and then he began to dig. The earth was very soft and loose and nice to dig in, and Poco quickly made a fine big hole. And then he came to what his nose had told him was there, and he dug all around it and pushed some of the things he had found with his nose, and when he had found one that was nice to take in his teeth, he caught hold of it and backed out of the entrance hole of the cave place, and came straight to Nadita, carrying the thing very proudly in his mouth.

Nadita, when she saw him, gave a little jump, and then she cried out:

"LOOK!—It is GOLD!" and her eyes were so big with wonder, it looked as if her face were *all* eyes.

"What is gold?" cried Chico, and the others came running to see.

"Is it the treasure of the kings?" asked Juan quickly. "Did we find that treasure?"

"Poco has found something," cried Nadita, and she began to jump up and down in excitement. "I think it must be what those men said they would hide—it must be the things the thief men took!"

A light was beginning to shine in the puzzled thoughts of Pancho. He could tell a little now what it was all about.

"We had better see about this," he said. "If this is the hiding place for thieves, they may come back —any time they might come back. I think we had better see quickly."

And when they brought out what Poco had found, even old Pancho was very greatly excited.

It was in a little pottery jar, and the men had buried it very quickly in loose earth. They had thought this place very safe, and had not used a great deal of care. There were rings and chains, brooches and watches, and even jingly gold coins that they had not yet dared to spend. It looked very much

like a treasure—even a treasure of kings—and there was a great shine in the eyes of those who looked at it.

"Poco found it," said Pancho very gravely, "and Poco belongs to Nadita. So, whatever comes of this, comes to Nadita."

The boys nodded. That was a fair thing—but Nadita was not so greatly pleased.

"It will be a hard thing," she said slowly, "to find all the ones for these things—only the thief men who took them know——"

Pancho laughed. "*You* will not do that," he said. "We will take this to the Jefe Politico [Chief of Police] and *he* will find them; and *then*"—he nodded slowly and spoke the words very clearly—"there is a prize for this—to bring back the stolen things—a very *great* prize—of money!" and he watched with a great pleasure the look that came into Nadita's eyes.

CHAPTER XI

THE PRIZE

What fun to have a bag of gold,
A bag of gold—a bag of gold—
And little shops to linger in—
Oh, little shops without an end—
And gold to spend and spend and spend!

A PRIZE! Nadita had not known about that, and the boys had forgotten the words of Pancho. A prize of *money!* That meant that she could buy things—and oh, what a wonderful thing that was—to buy things! In the market-place and in the little stores where she had looked so many times—how *many* times she had walked down the streets with Pancho or with Chico and the boys and stopped in front of the little shops and the big ones and looked and looked and looked! And in the market-place where the great stalls were piled high with good things to eat and see and smell; and how she had longed—with a great longing to buy, but never, except for the saint day of Pancho, had she ever owned

more than one centavo at a time with which to buy anything. And now greater and greater grew her excitement as she thought about it. There were so *many* things to buy—and there were Pancho and Juan and Chico and Pedro and Tia—yes, and all the little ones of Tia—to buy for. But maybe the prize was not that big—it would take very much money to buy all the things that she wanted to buy. Almost she was afraid to ask Pancho how big was that prize. A hat for Pancho—the kind all the fine gentlemen wore—with much silver braid and little dancing balls hanging from the brim—that would cost a very great deal of money—she could not guess how much. And a new red sash for Chico—the one that he wore now was frayed almost into little rags. And a pair of yellow shoes for Juan—not ever could she think how anyone could want *shoes*, but Juan had said, many times, how he would be very happy to wear shoes on feast days when his mother took him to church. And always Pedro had wanted a knife to put in his belt. And for Tia—— Oh, surely, no prize could ever be big enough for all those things.

"Did the men say," she asked in a very small voice, of Pancho, "did they say how big was that prize?"

"Oh," she cried, "I feel like dancing!"

"We will go now and find out," said Pancho, and he made the boys go home, for, he said, if they went into town like that, in such a great crowd, maybe they would frighten the gendarmes all away; and there was a twinkle in his eyes, but the boys did as he said, for always they minded the words of Pancho.

And Pancho did not leave the jewel things in the little pottery jar, but wrapped them in his sash and put them in the front of his shirt.

"If we meet those thief men now," he said, "they will not guess the place where we have been; but I hope that we do not meet them."

Nadita did not hear what he said. "Oh," she cried, "I feel like dancing—*all* of me *feels* like that, inside. And like running *fast*—and jumping so high I could feel how the little clouds are soft, like bubbles—and like singing, too, I feel! What makes me to feel like that?"

Pancho smiled. "Maybe it is because you are not very big," he said, "or because the sun shines warm, that you feel like that; or maybe—but that would be strange—maybe it is because of that prize!"

They were in the town now, and at one place they came to a little shop. It was a very small shop, but

Nadita stood at the front of it and looked with shining eyes at the hats and blankets and mats and great jumbles of things that were for sale. She would like now to begin to buy things—she would like to buy everything in the shop—but not yet was there any money!

Many people smiled at her as they passed by. They could not help smiling at Nadita—there was such a shine to her, as if a little candle were lighted inside—but she grew shy at their smiles and held tight to the hand of Pancho.

"Oh," she cried suddenly, "there is the house of Tia. I think maybe I had better go there. I have a thing to say. You go very slowly a little way, and then I will come," and she ran to the house and then stopped outside the familiar green door. What would Tia say to see her again—when she had not come back? Tia, who had not had many kind words and who had been very angry that Nadita had chosen to keep Poco rather than come back and live with her.

Somebody was crying—even through the door Nadita could hear that, and it was not one of the little ones. It made an ache place to come into her

heart to hear that sound, and very carefully and slowly she pushed open the green door and put her little black head into the room.

Tia sat on the floor with her hands over her face, and she was crying like someone who has cried for a long time. Nadita could not tell whether she had heard the door open or not—she did not look up and she did not stop crying. There were three little children in the room, and they looked at Nadita as if they did not know her—with round, black eyes of wonder.

"Tia," said Nadita softly, and the woman put down her hands quickly and looked at her with red eyes full of tears.

"Why do you come here?" she asked in a broken voice. "There is no food for you here—there is nothing for you. Go back where you can get food."

"I did not come for food," said Nadita, and her voice had a little pity sound in it. "I did not come for that. I came for another thing——" and she stopped; it was not very easy to say. Maybe Tia did not know about her husband—about the things he had done. "Have you seen Ramon this day?" asked Nadita timidly—that was the name of the husband of Tia.

"No," said Tia, and she said it sharply, even though she was crying. "No, I have not seen him to-day, nor *any* day for a very great time. He does not bring food any more—see how the little ones starve—and always, they say, he drinks that pulque. No, I have not seen him. Why do you ask that?" and she stopped crying to hear the words that Nadita would say.

"I think," said Nadita, "maybe some men will look for him—maybe they will come here."

"What is it?" cried Tia. "What is it now he has done? I know that he goes with a man who steals—that Bartolo. Do they say now that he also steals?—is that what you would say?"

"That is what someone says," said Nadita bravely. "And I thought, if I told it to you, maybe you could make him to go somewhere—where the men could not find him."

"Oh," said Tia, and there was wonder in her voice, "you came to tell me that?" But then very quickly another thought came into her mind. "But I want the men to get him," she cried. "If it is true that he steals, I want them to get him, and then, maybe, he will be better. If they will take away that Bartolo from him and put him for a time in a place where he

cannot drink pulque, maybe he would be good again —as he was at the first," and Tia began again to weep very bitterly.

This was a surprising thing. Nadita had not thought that Tia would want the gendarmes to get Ramon. But maybe it was a thing she could not understand—maybe that was the way that grown people thought about things.

"Then," she said slowly, "if they—if those gendarmes ask me about that—if they want me to tell if I saw him—you want me to say—yes?"

Tia nodded her head several times. "If you saw him, tell them, yes," she said; "and then maybe he will learn to be better. Not for a long time has he bought us any food."

"Wait!" cried Nadita, and turned quickly to the door. "In a little I will come back, and I will bring you food."

"What is that you say?" called Tia after her. "How can you bring food? You have no money," and she looked with round eyes after Nadita.

"Wait and see," cried Nadita, and ran out of the door. This was not the kind of present she had thought to buy for Tia, but somehow it made a very happy feeling in her heart that she could help, and

she told Pancho about it. He was very surprised and made his mouth into a big O.

"That is a bad thing," he said—"a very bad thing about Tia, and it is good if you can help, but"—and he smiled a little and put his head on one side—"have you heard a thing they say, Little Nothing, about making count of little chickens while they are still in the egg—eh?—Have you heard about that?"

"Is it a tale?" asked Nadita. "I think I have not heard of that."

"Ah, well," he said, "we shall see—we shall see."

And they *did* see, and it *was* well—very well, indeed. For the Jefe Politico paid a big prize to Nadita—more money than she had ever thought could be in this world, and with half of it in her hands she went straight to Tia and found her still on the floor, and she put the money in her lap, and there was such excitement in her voice that hardly could Tia tell what were the words she said. But Tia did not need words at all at that time—when she saw the money. She would not have heard them. For a little she thought she was in a dream—and then she looked up at Nadita, and a strange look was in her eyes. "I do not know," she said in a voice that trembled very much, "I do not understand—not at all—but—

but——" and her voice trembled so much then that Nadita had to listen very carefully to hear what she would say, and the words were very low—"I am sorry about—about—that little dog"; and Nadita went down on the floor and put her arms around the neck of Tia; and she knew then that it was worry thoughts about food for her little ones that had made Tia to be cross, and not again was she cross—not to Nadita—ever.

"And I have something very good to tell you," said Nadita, and she squeezed the hand of Tia tight. "That man of the gendarmes has talked with Ramon —and Ramon has had a great fright and he has promised the man that not ever will he drink again of that pulque, and the gendarme told him where he could go to work to earn money, and he has said that he will be good to you and bring food for the little ones."

"Oh," cried Tia, "I think that never in all the world have I been so happy!"

"And I am more happy than you," laughed Nadita, and she jumped up and ran to the door—"two times more happy!" She did not think to say goodbye, and she did not notice that Tia had given no thanks at all—little things like that do not count when there are very big thoughts in the heart; and

besides, she had remembered Pancho outside, waiting —Pancho with the other part of the prize money, and all the shops and market-places full to the very top with things to buy!

And she bought the big hat with silver braid on it for Pancho! At first he said he would not take it, but she ran to the man who had it, and she gave him the money that he said it would cost, and Pancho was very pleased and put it on his head, and Nadita said he looked like a very grand Señor. And she bought the red sash for Chico and the knife for Pedro, and put in a little piece of paper the money for shoes for Juan, and still there was money left from the prize—and this she gave into the hand of Pancho.

"That is to go in the little bag," she said. "I want you to keep that always with the money you have put away."

Pancho looked at her thoughtfully for a moment, but he put the money very carefully into his sash.

"And now," he said, "what will you buy for Nadita?" and Nadita smiled that he should be so foolish, and she gave a little skip that was a sign of the joy that was inside of her.

"There is not anything more that I want to

buy, right now," she said. "All of that prize was for me."

Pancho nodded, and the look in his eyes was very wise—"That is as I thought," he said, "and no gift do you buy for Nadita. Let us go back to that big store by the market-place."

"Oh, no," cried Nadita. "You must keep that money I have given to you—there is not anything more that I want to buy."

"No," said Pancho, "but I have a little secret that you do not know. Listen to this: When you talked to the gendarme man about that Ramon, I talked with a Señora who came into the place—she came to see if they had found her jewels that were stolen."

"Oh," said Nadita, and surprise was in her eyes.

"And when she knew they had been found—those jewels—she was very glad, and she gave to me something for you—*two* things she gave me."

"Quick—tell me!" cried Nadita. "I thought no more good things *could* come. Oh, Pancho—I think *never* was anyone happy like me. What did the Señora give you?"

"She gave me this for you," and over the shiny black head Pancho slipped a fine chain of gold.

"And," he said, "she gave me money to buy a dress for the chain to rest upon."

"O—o—oh!" breathed Nadita, and her little fingers went up to her neck to feel the chain. She did not say any more than that, but Pancho knew that if the Señora could see the look in her eyes she would know that she had received her thanks.

CHAPTER XII

THE YELLOW CAT

The falling petals from a tree
Can bring so many things to me—
The memories of gardens fair—
The roses in a lady's hair,
And all the romance I can feel
Of long ago in old Castile!

PANCHO was chuckling to himself, and Nadita looked at him with surprise in her eyes.

"Look," he said, "can you see how Poco looks from here?"

They were alone under the big tree—Nadita, Pancho, and Poco—and for a little the pottery wheel was quiet as Pancho took a while to smoke and rest. Poco was sound asleep in a little spot of sunshine—yellow as gold—and Pancho chuckled again as he looked at him.

"It is a yellow cat, he looks like," he said. "Can you not see how he looks like a yellow cat?"

Nadita looked at Poco, and then she put her head on one side and looked again.

"I think—*maybe*—he looks like a yellow cat," she said doubtfully, but Pancho laughed aloud at the look in her face.

"It is that you do not know about that yellow cat?" he said. "Did I never tell that tale to you?"

Very quickly the look in Nadita's face changed to one of great content. This was the thing she liked best of all, and she came close to Pancho on the grass and folded her hands in her lap to show how great was her attention.

"No," she said eagerly, "not ever did you tell that one. What is that tale about the yellow cat?"

"Well, it is not *all* about a cat," began Pancho. "And it was a very long time ago—before there was white on this old head of mine, and before ever I had learned to make jars on a pottery wheel—before even I knew the Padrón—and that is a very great while ago indeed. I lived then as servant in the house of a very grand Señora, who was of the noble families of old Castile. She was big and fat, and with eyebrows that came together, and on her lip was a very nice little black mustache."

"Oh," said Nadita in surprise, "do Señoras have mustaches?"

Pancho threw back his head and laughed. "Very

often I have seen them with them," he said. "I think those Señoras of old Spain were proud to have mustaches—especially as with this one—when there was no man in the house. The Señor had died three or four years before I came into that place, and the Señora was like a man and very much feared. The house was a very fine and big house, with windows having little balconies of stone to them and bars of iron like a cage. And all the middle part of the house, coming right up to the big iron gate in the front and running to the high stone wall at the back, was garden. A very beautiful garden that was—a garden that you would have liked, with a little fountain that ran tinkling in white marble, and birds that sang all day in pretty cages, and the smell of jasmine and mignonette and orange bloom everywhere, and often the scents from foreign lands that ladies wear in their hair and on their little fluttering fans. And there was a little Señorita in the garden, a little niña like yourself—with big black eyes and a wondering look—and always she made me to think of the birds in their cages, for she was not happy in the garden and would stand and look through the bars of the gate at the outside world that went dancing by; and I have seen the little tears to run down her cheeks as

she looked, and there was a big ache in my heart to see her so. She was very lonely, and the Señora, her mother, could see that, too, and she would drive away in her big carriage and come back with things from the shops for the little niña—laces and pretty little fans, I have seen her bring, and dolls and music boxes, and one time she brought a parrot from far-off South America, and the little niña would smile and clap her hands for a little, and then she would grow sad again and stand at the gate and look and look—and look! In a little, I will come to that yellow cat!"

"But do not miss any of the tale," cried Nadita, and wriggled with content. "I want you to tell it all."

"Yes," nodded Pancho, "I will tell it all. One day, when the little niña was standing at the gate, she grew greatly excited and pointed with her finger. '*There!*' she cried. 'Bring me that!' and they looked and saw that what she wanted was a little beggar child out in the street—very dirty and very ragged, and who played with a great yellow cat. The Señora threw up her hands and rolled her eyes—'*Never!*' she cried. 'Not ever can my little mariposa [butterfly] play with beggars in the street!—and a *cat—pouff!—never!*' and she looked very fierce when she said it, but the little niña did not say one word—only she

stood close to that big iron gate and looked and looked."

"Oh," said Nadita softly, and there were tears in her eyes, "I have a sorry place for that little girl."

Pancho nodded and went on: "I, too, had a sorry place for that little niña, and also one other in that house felt as I felt—and together we made a plan. When the Señora went out that day in her big carriage to drive in the Paseo, we found the little beggar child, and we brought him into the garden—him and his cat. And never have I seen anyone so happy as that little niña. She played and danced like a little fairy, and fed cakes to the beggar child and yellow cream to the cat and—'Oh, look!' she cried to me—'See, Pancho, how she is yellow, and her name is Amarilla [yellow], too. Oh, how I *love* that cat!' and then she would dance around Carlitos—that was the name of the little beggar boy—and throw flowers at him and show him the little goldfish that swam in the fountain—and pink came into her cheeks and a shine to her eyes—and very *much* she was like another little girl altogether. But, then, the one who was watching at the gate came running to say that the carriage of the Señora was near, and we bundled Carlitos and Amarilla, the cat, out through the little

back gate in the wall, and again the garden was a quiet and a lonely place. When the Señora came in, there was pink in her cheeks, too—a very unusual thing—and it was plain to see that she was excited and she did not notice that the little niña was not quiet and sad any more, and that when she stood at the big gate she would wave her hand to someone outside. And every day, after that, for a while—when the Señora drove away to the Paseo—the little beggar boy and his cat, Amarilla, came to the garden to play. And then another thing happened, and we knew then why the Señora had been excited—with the pink in her cheeks—for when she came back from the Paseo, one day, and it was the hour for the taking of tea—a Señor came to call—a very tall, very dark Señor, with black eyes that were sharp as a sword, and a long, pale face. We did not like him, that Señor, and the little niña was afraid of him, for he never smiled, and his hand was like a dead fish when it touched you. But he came many times, and the Señora was all smiles and pink cheeks when he came, and looked at him over the top of her fan, and fed him little cakes and the red wine of Oporto—and they would talk for a long time in the garden by the little fountain—and even the birds in their cages were quiet while

he was there. We knew very well why that Señor came, for everyone knew that the Señora was very rich and had houses and lands even back in old Valencia. And in a little, after the Señor had been coming for some time, she said that it would be a good thing if there were a man at the head of the house, and when she said that, we knew that she thought to marry the Señor, and we were very unhappy. But the little niña was very happy until one day Carlitos did not come, and she waited at the big iron gate with her face pressed against the bars and looked out into the street until the carriage of the Señora came back again, and then she sat down in the garden, and there was a sorrow in her face that hurt like a sharp thing in my heart. For several days it was like that——"

"Oh," said Nadita in a low voice, "I hope that no bad thing had happened to Carlitos or to that yellow cat."

"No," said Pancho, "no bad thing happened, and you shall see that he came again—on the very day that was right. The little niña, one day, had waited at the gate as always when the Señora drove away, and this time she saw him coming with Amarilla in his arms, and she opened the gate herself and let him

in, and that was why, when the Señora came back, no one was watching to see her come, and almost she ran on top of that little Carlitos; but I pulled him into a room and closed the shutter, and she was so excited that she did not see. But Amarilla still sat in the patio—very quietly, under a big chair, and no one noticed that she was there. The Señora made high her hair and put in it a very fine comb, and she wore a lace mantilla from Spain, and put a red rose at the neck of her dress—and then she ordered a big cake and wine and little candies made of nuts to be served in the garden, and she sat in a big chair by the white fountain and made her fan to go very fast, back and forth, and we were not surprised when in a little that Señor came. We had not let Carlitos out of the room, for we had fear the Señora would see him and scold —and Amarilla, the yellow cat, still lay, very quietly, under the chair where the Señora sat. And through the shutter I could see the Señor and the Señora as they talked."

"I think," said Nadita, moving very suddenly, with the light of excitement in her eyes, "I think a thing is going to happen!"

"What do you think?" asked Pancho, with a tease

sound in his voice. "What do you think will happen?"

"Oh, I do not know—please, go on quickly—I cannot wait!" said Nadita.

And Pancho smiled at her. "Yes, a thing did happen," he said; "and it was not a thing I would have guessed—or the Señora would have guessed—and it seemed to be a very terrible thing at the first. The serving girl came into the garden with the beautiful big cake on a tray—whipped cream was on the cake, and it was very good to see, and there was wine on the tray, and little glasses; and just as she came near to the chair of the Señora, Amarilla, the yellow cat, very quietly got up from her place under the chair and made her back to arch up, and she rubbed against the ankles of the little serving girl who had the tray. Then a great many things happened all at the same time. The girl gave a very terrible scream —she did not know about that yellow cat—and she threw the tray straight up into the air without any thought or care of where it might come down. And the beautiful cake came down, upside-down, on the nice shiny head of the Señor—and he was very queer-looking at once. And the jar of wine went into the

lap of the Señora, and the little glasses went everywhere in many pieces. Amarilla was greatly surprised, but not so surprised as was the Señora, to hear the words that came from that Señor. Cream was on his head and in his eyes, and little sugary pieces of cake all over him, but the words that he said were not the words of a fine gentleman. The Señora looked at him—it was not the way she had looked over the top of her fan—and then she called to me to come and to take the cream from him; and when he went away she sat for a long time in the chair by the fountain—and then she began to laugh. At first just a little laugh came, and then she would stop, and then she would laugh some more—and after a while she threw back her head and laughed until the servants peeped through the doors into the garden to see what it was that had happened—and she laughed until the tears came rolling down her cheeks; and then she called to know where was that yellow cat. 'Where did it come from?' she asked, when I had brought Amarilla very carefully to her chair. And then, because she looked to be very happy and I thought she would not have anger, I told her about Carlitos and his yellow cat, and how the little niña grew happy because of them. And she did not laugh then, she

The girl gave a very terrible scream.

put out her hand and she stroked the cat with a great thoughtfulness in her eyes, and there was a very kind and gentle look in her face. 'You shall have a beautiful ribbon,' she said to Amarilla, 'and always you shall come and play with my little mariposa—you and Carlitos. I think you have saved me from a very bad thing this day, and I shall give you a dish of good cream.' And, after that," said Pancho, "after that the little niña did not have to wait at the gate for Carlitos to come, for already he was there! The Señora found that he had no mother and no father"—("Like me," breathed Nadita.)—"and she brought him to her house to live with the niña, and, after a while, he was made, in the law, like her very own son. And Amarilla had many new ribbons, and always they say, in that house, there is a yellow cat."

"Oh," sighed Nadita, "only one thing is too bad."

"And what is that?" asked Pancho.

"Always to every tale there is a stop place," said Nadita. "And how I wish they could go on and on—always."

CHAPTER XIII

THE TRAVELING CARNIVAL

How glad and gay
The banners sway,
In sunshine bright,
From tented height!
And music tinkles like a stream
Through happy visions of a dream!
The carnival—a magic thing—
Comes now to make the children sing!

IT DID not look like a place where a big adventure could come—but you shall see.

It was such a quiet little street. With long adobe walls and little green doors, and here and there a shop where a merchant dozed over his wares. There was no one in all the street but a little burro with a very high load on his back, and the barefooted man who drove him. And then—very suddenly—it seemed as if everyone in all the town was in that street, running, and with a noise that could be heard from a great way off and a dust that was like a cloud!

Pancho was coming home from market, and he had only just entered the quiet little street when the

strange thing happened. At first he only looked at the people who passed him—he was too surprised to do more than that—and then he called to one to know why he ran.

"If you do not run," shouted this one back, "he will get you—it is a lion—he is very wild."

"A lion!" said Pancho to himself. "How can there be a lion in this town?"

"It is a tiger!" shouted another man, then—"A tiger is coming down this street!" And everyone was shouting about an animal that was wild. But Pancho could not run fast, and besides, he did not think that these crazy ones spoke true; but it was plain that there was something that made them all to run—and Pancho stood very close to a little green door that could open easily if a lion did come along very close to him, and he waited to see what would come.

After a little, there were not so many people, and the little green doors had banged shut, and the dust began to settle down into the roadway once more, and then there were no people at all, but old Pancho waiting in the street; and the flutter of curtains behind barred windows told of those who watched in safety.

And then, very quietly ambling, with a little nose that sniffed here and there in the air for the odor of something good to eat, and a long chain that dragged on the ground, came a brown bear! He was not very little and he was not very big, for a bear, but he did not look at all wild, and Pancho did not try to get into the little green door when he saw him coming, but he walked out slowly into the street and picked up the end of the chain, and when he did that the bear stopped. They looked at each other then, and the bear very calmly sat down in the dust of the street and lifted up his two front paws and Pancho saw that he had an iron ring in his nose, and the chain was fastened to that.

A very brave man who had been running down the street came back now, and he was altogether out of breath, but when he saw that Pancho had the bear safely by the end of the chain, he stopped a good distance away and called to him.

"He is from the traveling carnival," he cried. "Up in the place of the old Alameda there is a carnival, and he got away from there."

"Then I will take him back to that place," said Pancho, and when he took a step back up the street

Pancho picked up the end of the chain.

the bear got down on his feet again and followed him like a little dog.

Pancho did not go all of the way to the Alameda, for, when he was almost there, a big man came walking very fast, and when he saw Pancho a smile came all over his face.

"Ah, my friend!" he cried. "You have brought back my Chocolate." (That was the name of the bear, but it is pronounced Choco-lah-tay.) "How I am glad for that. Always he runs away, and all of my time it takes to find him. Ah! he is a bad boy!" and he gave the bear a little slap on the side of the face. "But now, my friend—you will come to the carnival, no?—For bringing Chocolate I will give you tickets. How many little ones will come to the carnival with Grandpa—eh?" It was clear that he had a very good nature, this man, and Pancho smiled back at him—and then, suddenly, he thought how very happy this thing would make four certain people that he knew, and he asked quickly:

"When do you have this carnival?"

"Oh, have they not told you?" cried the man. "Do you not read? All the world knows that *this* is the day—now, in a little while we will begin."

"There are four little ones," said Pancho then quickly.

"And one for Grandpa!" said the man, and with a laugh he pushed five bits of red paper into the hand of Pancho and turned and walked quickly back to the Alameda place, leading Chocolate, the bear, by the chain.

And that was just the *first* part of the adventure!

* * * * * * *

"What is a carnival?" cried Nadita, when Pancho had told her quickly the news, and she jumped up and down with excitement. "And do I put on my new nice dress, and must I wear the yellow shoes?"

"Yes—yes!" answered Pancho, and he was as excited as she. "*Every*thing put on that is nice! And we will take some tamales in the hand, so that we will not get hungry. A long time ago I went to a carnival, and I was hungry. It is a wonderful thing—a carnival. Now I will go and get Chico and Juan and Pedro." And when he brought them, there was such a noise and excitement under the big tree that very much it looked like the carnival was there and not in the Alameda place.

"And what will I do with Poco?" cried Nadita.

She was very grandly dressed now in her new red dress, with yellow shoes that squeaked very loudly, and she was so excited she hardly knew what she did.

The boys did not know, and Nadita could not guess what a carnival could be, and Pancho had not had time to explain.

"You will see—you will see," he said, over and over again. "And now we must go, or there will be no carnival. Tie Poco up with a string. He cannot come—that bear would eat him up, maybe." And then they were ready—and everybody else was ready—for it looked as if all the town were going to the carnival.

Chico and Juan and Pedro had not had time to dress as their mothers would like to have them dress, but each had a part of the face that was very clean and shiny, and their hair was flat and wet with water. Chico had tied quickly his new red sash about his waist, and Juan was most uncomfortable in the shoes that Nadita had given to him, but they were all very happy and carried each in one hand a fat tamale wrapped in corn husk that Pancho had given them, and in the other hand a centavo to spend.

"Always there are things to buy," said Pancho. "And now, we will go."

And such a noise as they came near to the Alameda place—and such dust and such dirt—it did not matter now if faces had places on them that were not fresh-washed, for no one could see for the added dust that was there. And the Alameda was a place altogether strange to see, with a high wall around it made of canvas stuff that was too high to see over.

Nadita and Chico and Juan and Pedro and Pancho did not know how ever they got through that great crowd, but, in a little, they were pushed this way and that way, and a man told them where to go and —*pop*—there they were—like little monkeys on one long stick. They were sitting on a narrow plank of wood, and they were part of a great big circle of people all sitting just as they were sitting, and shouting and laughing at a funny man with a very white face. Nadita wished then that she had four eyes, or maybe more than that, for surely, with only two, she could never see all the things that were here this day to see. The middle part of the big circle was empty of people, she could see that, and there were queer-looking boxes in it with big stars and circles on them, and little things on the boxes that looked very exciting. She could see where the music came from now, too. People in beautiful shiny clothes were playing

the music in a place like a little wagon and *never* was there such beautiful music—only you could not hear it very well for all the other noise.

Pancho was shouting now, and pointing with his finger at a thing the funny man was doing. He was dressed, that funny man, in clothes that looked big enough for a whole family to wear, and very suddenly he saw a man in the crowd of people that he knew very well, and he tried to get to him, and climbed over a great many people, and fell down and rolled over and over, and Chico laughed so hard he dropped down from the narrow plank where they were sitting, and Pancho had a hard time to get him back again, and Chico lost his tamale and also his centavo.

Then the music began to play more loudly than ever, and Nadita saw that everyone stretched the neck as far as possible, and mothers lifted up little babies to see, and Chico cried out in wonder. A great crowd of people in beautiful shiny clothes of bright colors and carrying waving flags and banners were marching around the whole place, and everyone cheered and shouted until you could not hear the music or anything at all but just noise. Never had Nadita seen such beautiful clothes; and the people who wore them smiled and bowed and waved their

hands and threw confetti and serpentinas, and then they all stood close together, and four men climbed on the shoulders of the others and two men on those, and then one man climbed right up to the top of them all, and waved a flag.

Nadita drew a long breath of wonder, and "O-o-oh!" said everybody in all that place. And then, so many things followed one after the other so quickly that Nadita grew confused. She remembered the big man and how he fought with Chocolate, the bear, and the other man who threw balls and sticks and plates of many colors into the air all at one time and did not drop one, and the lady who walked on a wire. That did not look like a thing that could be true. (Nadita shut her eyes tight, when she saw it, and then opened them again, but the lady was still there, and it was a truly thing and not a dream.) And there were two ladies who danced and stood on the tips of their toes and sang songs, and the strong man—it was the same one who had Chocolate—who held other men up in his bare hands, and lifted a mule with his teeth, and threw up big balls that weighed as much as a house! And there was a man who ate fire and swallowed knives and stuck long pins in his face. But the thing that she remembered best of all—the thing that

everybody remembered and that was the other part of the adventure—came now! And just this way it happened!

A man walked into the circle place and put a high ladder thing in the very middle. He was dressed in green clothes covered with gold stars, and he was very thin. He climbed up on top of the ladder and then stood up on his hands and made his feet to come down to his head. Just then there was a very great noise—a growling and barking and snapping, and a crying and shouting of many people—and into the circle place came what looked to be a bunch of brown animal. At first nobody could see what it was, at all, and then it bumped against the ladder thing, and the green man came down in a heap and landed on the big part of the brown animal—and it was Chocolate —and he was very much surprised and very frightened, and stopped quickly fighting with the little brown animal and ran, howling, out of the circle, with the green man on his back. It was so funny that everybody thought it was a part of the show and got up in their seats and shouted and laughed. But Nadita looked hard at the little brown animal that was still in the circle, and she began to climb down quickly.

"It is Poco!" she cried. "Look—it is Poco! He has come to find me." And everyone else was climbing down now and going out of the place and shouting at everybody and everything they could see. It was hard to find the place where Poco had gone, and Nadita could not see Pancho or the boys any more.

"Poco!" she called. "Poco—come!" But Poco could not hear, and she could not see him. A woman who belonged to the show was standing by the canvas wall, and she had a very black look on her face. "Have you seen my Poco?" Nadita asked her timidly—"my little brown dog?"

The woman looked at her quickly, and almost it seemed to Nadita as if a fire flashed out of her eyes. "Was that your dog?" she cried in a low voice. "That dog has made a ruin of all this show. *Never* has a thing like that happened before in this show. Where is he?" and she caught hold of Nadita and shook her.

"I do not know where he is—let me go," said Nadita.

"I will beat that dog when I find him," cried the woman. "My husband has the most wonderful act in all the world, and that—that dog has made of him a thing to laugh at."

"He is my little dog," said Nadita. "He did not

mean a harm thing—he came to find me—and you shall not hurt him. Not *ever* does he harm anyone—he loves only—everyone!"

The woman did not say anything more, but she let Nadita go, and she walked away. Not anywhere was there a sign of Poco, and now many people were gone out of the place, and it was easier to look. For a long time, it seemed to Nadita, she looked everywhere for the little dog—under the seats, and back of the queer boxes, and under canvas pieces that were back by the walls, and then, after a while—there were Pancho and the boys, and when they saw her they came running.

"Hi!" called Pancho. "Everywhere I have looked for you, and I thought maybe you had gone home—and here is Poco. Why have you waited in this place?"

Nadita felt very tired suddenly, and it was good to see Poco there in the arms of Pancho. She did not know why she wanted to cry, but that was the thing that she wanted more than anything else to do, and Pancho saw the tremble of the little lip.

"It is the supper that you want," he said quickly. "And, here—take this dog." He put Poco in her arms. "A woman was holding him, and she gave to him a

very good supper." Nadita forgot about crying then and opened her eyes very wide.

"Was it a show woman?" she asked, with a growing excitement in her voice.

"Yes," nodded Pancho, "a woman of the carnival —and she had a black bruise on her head. She said that she stumbled on a rope and hit her head on a box, and for a little she did not know anything at all, and then, when she opened her eyes, Poco was licking her face and he barked until a man came to help her, and she says that she thinks now he is a very good little dog, but she said that a little while ago she wanted to beat him. It was queer talk, and I do not know of what she was speaking, but she gave him food, and when I told her that he was your dog, she said she was glad that you have him. And now'—Pancho put his head high and sniffed the air—"I think I smell now the supper for us that is waiting in that big iron pot." And Nadita pushed her little hand into his big one and they started—all five of them—back for the home place.

"And do you like a carnival?" asked Pancho of them all. "I think—me—I like a carnival very much."

"But the very *nicest* part of a carnival-show," said

Nadita, with a little skip of returning happiness—"to *me* the nicest part of a carnival is the go-home part—afterwards."

And the boys laughed to hear that—and Pancho laughed, too.

CHAPTER XIV

IN STRANGE PLACES

The big, old tree is calling me,
A thousand voices strong—
I hear the whisper of its leaves,
I hear them all day long—
I see the moonlight flutter down,
In flood of silver light,
Through shining leaves of gray and brown—
A glory in the night.

PANCHO had taught to Nadita a little trick. It did not seem very little to her while she was learning it, and it took a great while and much patience, both of Pancho to teach and of herself to learn. The trick was to climb a rope just like a little monkey climbs a tree—straight up into the limbs of the big tree or over a wall. Pancho had learned it when he was a little boy and his hands and feet had never forgotten, though the rest of him had now to go very slowly. Not yet had Nadita shown it to the boys, for she wanted first to be very sure that she would make no mistakes and would not slip when she was showing it.

Hand-over-hand she would go—up and up, and it was like being in another world to go high in the branches of the big tree and look down at people, like little ants, who passed in the roadway.

On the morning after the carnival day, Nadita was doing this trick. She could do it so easily now that very soon she would show it to the boys. They had not yet come to play, and Pancho had gone with the Padrón to some place, and Poco was sound asleep on a blanket in the little room. So Nadita climbed up into the big tree and down again and played a little game all by herself. And she did not know that, as she played, a strange woman with a black rebozo over her head watched her with eyes that were narrow and sharp.

For a little the woman watched without speaking. Her look followed Nadita as she went up into the tree, and then she nodded to herself and spoke out loud.

"That is a very good trick that you can do," she said.

Nadita almost jumped out of her skin when the woman spoke, and the rope slipped in her hand. She slid down to the ground, and then she looked to see. The woman was smiling now—a sort of smile that

stretched out her mouth but did not show in her eyes. And she nodded again at Nadita.

"I am from the traveling carnival," she said, "and I know when I see a good trick. Do you live in this place?"

Nadita did not like the look in the woman's eyes, and the smile did not make a smile feeling to come to her, but she answered very politely:

"Yes, Señora, I live in this place." The woman looked about her as if she were thinking, and her eyes were just little narrow black places in her face.

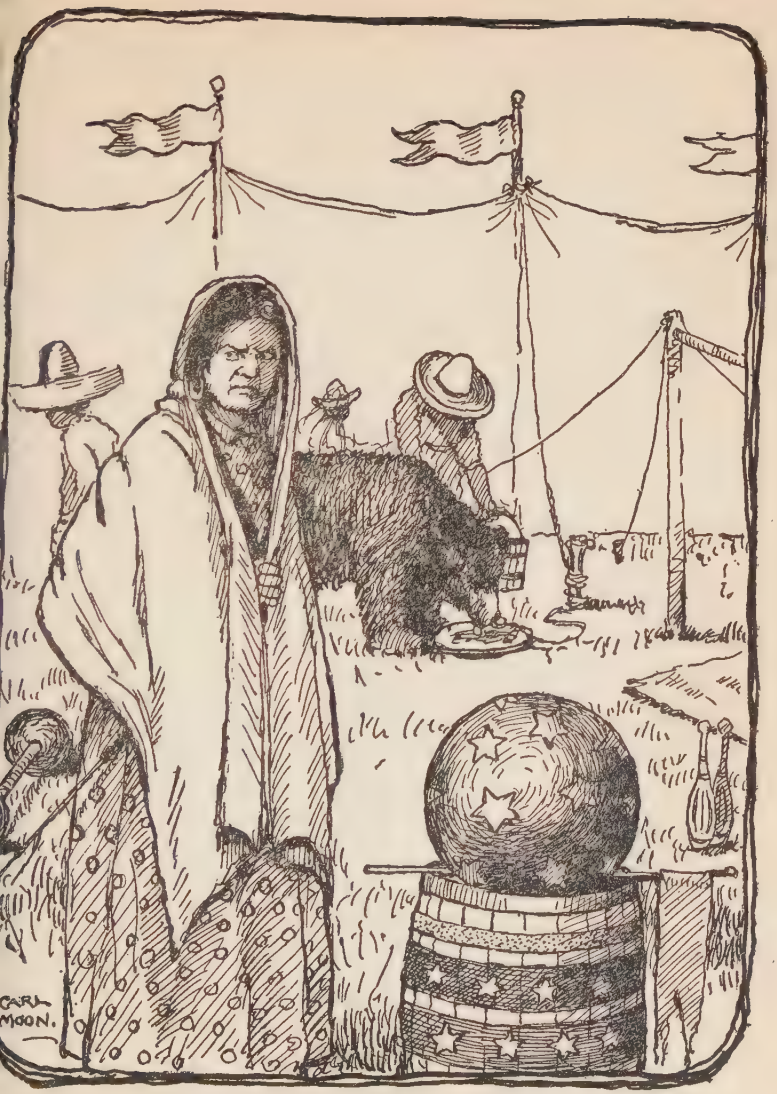
"Who lives with you?" she asked then, and she did not look into the eyes of Nadita as she asked it.

"I live with Pancho," answered Nadita. "He makes jars, and he is very old."

"Ah," said the woman then, and she looked at Nadita with a look that seemed to have relief in it, and for a little she did not speak—she seemed to be planning things. "I have a little monkey," she said at last slowly. "If you will come I will show him to you."

Nadita looked down and wriggled her toes in the dust. She did not want to go with this woman, but a little monkey—not *ever* had she seen a little monkey.

"He can do tricks," said the woman impatiently.



A strange woman watched Nadita with eyes that were narrow and sharp.

"Come! See how the wagons are close—in the road. Come quickly or I will not show you."

Nadita looked, and there, very plainly, *were* the wagons in the roadway. Like magic they had come there—one moment the whole place was empty, and then—the wagons were there! With color and noise and dust! It was not far, as the woman had said, and there could be no harm if she saw the little monkey and came quickly back before Pancho could return.

The woman saw the look in her eyes and knew that she need not say more. She tossed the end of her rebozo over her shoulders. "Come," she said shortly, and Nadita followed her.

The wagons were very gay to see. There were flags and big pictures, and even the mules who pulled them had bright-colored streamers hanging from their harness and big gold stars pasted to their sides. There were many people, too—laughing and talking—and they stared at Nadita and the woman so that Nadita for a little wished that she had not come. But the woman looked at them and made a sign, and then they talked together and did not stare any more.

"You must come in this wagon," said the woman. "This is where the monkey does his tricks. Sit here and I will bring him"; and she lifted Nadita up into

the back of a big wagon that was covered all over with canvas, and then she pulled down a little flap of canvas, and it was like a small room and was quite dark inside. Nadita immediately had a big thought of fear. There was no little monkey here. All the inside of the canvas was covered with hanging clothes —the shiny, bright clothes that she had seen the show people wear, and there were many blankets and big rolls of canvas and coils of rope—and then, quite suddenly, she felt a little jerk, and all the hanging clothes began to sway back and forth—THE WAGON WAS MOVING!

The heart of Nadita came into her mouth, and she jumped to her feet and pushed at the canvas place where she had come into the wagon, but it was fastened tight from the outside, and she could not move even a little corner of it.

"I want to get out!" she cried in a frightened voice. "I do not want to see a monkey. I want to get out!" Somebody laughed when she said that, and that was all. There was much noise now—of creaking harness and big turning wheels, and a clanking of chains and the calls of the men who drove the mules, and much laughing and talking, and a baby began to cry in one

of the other wagons; so that no one could hear now the voice of Nadita, no matter how loudly she cried. She sat down suddenly on the blankets in the wagon, and a terrified wonder came to her. What was this thing that had happened? She could not understand at all. Why had the woman put her in the wagon, and why were they taking her away? And how would she find her way back if they took her very far? And oh, what would Pancho think? For even a very big person, these would have been very terrible thoughts, and for Nadita they were more than her heart would hold. She put her little face down into her hands and sobbed until she could cry no more. And then she must have gone to sleep, for the next thing she knew it was very dark. No light came in now through the canvas of the wagon except a yellow glow place in the front that must have come from a lantern—and the wagon was standing still.

It must be night outside, and where were they now, she wondered, with fresh terror. She banged with her little fists on the canvas of the wagon and cried out in a voice that was choked with sobs.

"Let me out of this place—I want Pancho—I want to get out!"

"Hush!" said a voice close at hand. "Hush, or I shall beat you! There is no harm coming to you—senseless one—if you behave."

"I want to get out," sobbed Nadita.

"Will you behave if I let you out?" said the voice again. "Will you be quiet and eat some supper?"

"I want to go back to Pancho," answered Nadita.

"I tell you, you cannot go back," said the voice again, very impatiently. "Sometime you can go back—maybe soon—if you are good. But just now you shall not go back. I have a very fine plan for you, it is a thing you will like, and you will have great tales to tell when you go back."

Nadita did not answer this time, she was very hungry and very tired of crying, and maybe, if she could only get out of this wagon thing, she could find a way to escape and get back to the big tree place that seemed very dear and very far away.

"Will you be good if I let you out?" asked the voice again, very sharply.

"Yes," answered Nadita in a small voice, and she tried hard to blink the tears away from her eyes.

There was a fumbling at the canvas then, and in a moment the flap was flung open and a breath of sweet night air rushed in. Nadita was a little bewildered by

what she saw. The wagons—there were four of them —were drawn to one side of the road, and the mules were eating peacefully a little distance away; but the strange thing to Nadita was the big fire shining in the night with the many people gathered about it, eating and talking and laughing. And Chocolate, the bear, was boxing with his master, who would slap him on one side of the face and then on the other and then they would go down on the ground and tumble together, while everyone laughed and shouted at them. The woman who had let Nadita out of the wagon was the same one who had told her about the little monkey, and she caught her now by the arm and pulled her toward the big fire and all the people there.

"Here is someone for you to know," she called out to them. "This is our little Mona [monkey]. She has a trick that is good, and we will dress her in a brown suit to look like skin."

"What does she do?" called a voice from one of those who sat about the fire.

"I will show you," answered the woman, and she walked back and got a coil of rope from the wagon and threw an end of it up over the branch of a tree that was near to the fire, and when she had fastened

it tight, she called to Nadita, who had stood very still where the woman had left her, "Come—show these people the thing that you were doing this morning in that big tree," she said.

Nadita felt a little shiver go all over her, and there was no strength at all in her—even her voice would not come. But she shook her head at the woman. She could not climb that rope before all these strange people—not for *anything* could she do that.

"Come!" said the woman fiercely, in a low voice "They are watching," and she gave a jerk to the arm of Nadita.

"No," answered Nadita, and her voice was very near to tears, "I cannot do that."

The face of the woman grew red, and Nadita could see that she was very angry. "Will you climb that rope?" she asked, and her eyes were bright in the light from the fire, but Nadita shook her head again. It was not that she did not want to do what the woman asked—it was that she *could* not do it. She felt very sure that she knew what would happen then—always Tia had had a look like that when she was very angry, and Nadita was not surprised when the woman gave her a quick, stinging slap on the cheek and jerked her back toward the wagon.

There was a loud laugh from those who sat about the fire. The woman was furious now and shook Nadita until her teeth chattered together.

"For that," she said, "you shall have no supper, and to-morrow, if you do not climb when I tell you to, I shall beat you with a stick," and she pushed Nadita back into the wagon and fastened down the canvas flap.

* * * * * * *

Back under the big tree there was much sorrow and worry and wonder. For a whole day and a night there had been no Nadita, and everywhere they had looked for her.

Pancho had gone, at last, to the Padrón and had asked that they might search through the garden, and the Padrón had been very interested and sorry and had gone with Pancho and the boys and had looked everywhere, but there was no sign of Nadita. Poco went with them when they searched and put his little nose in the air and whined and cried, but he was not old enough yet to know how to follow where Nadita had gone, and he did not help them to find her. The Padrón asked many questions about Nadita —he remembered her very well, and she had made a warm place in his heart with her big black eyes and

shy little ways. He said that he would tell the gendarmes to look for her, and if anyone had taken her, they would be punished and would be put in a prison behind bars, but that did not bring Nadita back, and the sun did not seem bright any more to Pancho or the boys with her gone. The old man tried to work at the pottery wheel, but he could not, and always something would make a stinging of the eyes when he thought of the "Little Nothing" that was not there, and he would look suddenly around, many times, to see if she came.

And another day passed, and still they could not find her, but away off, in another town, things were happening, and we had better see about them!

* * * * * * *

This was again a day of carnival-show! And there were much excitement and talking and laughing as there had been that other day and a hurrying all over town to go to the plaza place where the high canvas wall with the fluttering flags was set up. But Pancho was not there to go—this was not in the town where Pancho lived—it was many miles away, and in a little room made with canvas walls close up against the big tent wall sat a little creature in a brown suit, right like her skin—a little creature that was called

"Mona" by the circus people, but by Pancho she would have been called Nadita.

She was very frightened, and there were red marks on her skin where the woman had beaten her. Not anybody here was kind to her except Chocolate, the bear. Chocolate would put his little cold nose to her cheek, and Nadita felt that he was trying to say gentle things in bear talk, and a little—a very *little*—he made her to think of Poco. The master of Chocolate had a very jolly way with people who were not in the show and he would smile a big smile and slap the men on their backs and call them *amigo* [friend]; but to those in the show he was not jolly, and Nadita was more afraid of him than she was of the woman who made her to climb the rope.

These had been very queer days for Nadita, but they were exciting days, too. From the very first morning when she had been awakened at daylight by the dark-faced woman, she had had to work, but some of the work she liked. They had given her gold stars made of paper to stick on the little boxes she had seen that first day, and made her to sew many buttons on shiny, beautiful clothes, and many, many times she had to climb up and down a rope. The dark-faced woman had made a suit of brown cloth for her and

it had a little tail fastened to it, and when she climbed up the rope the others of the circus laughed and shouted at her and said how truly she was more like a little monkey than like a child; and the cheeks of Nadita grew very red when they said that, but she did not let them see how she did not like it—always if she let them see that they would say more things that had a hurt in them; and if she said she would not climb the woman would beat her—already she had done it more than one time. So the outside of Nadita turned into a little monkey—Mona—and did not smile and did not cry very much, but the inside of her was all Nadita, and every minute of the time she made plans how she would get away from these people and run back to Pancho and the big tree place.

For two days they had traveled along the road in the wagons, and people had come running to see them pass, and little boys had shouted and made big eyes of wonder and envy when they had seen Nadita sitting in the wagon. She was the only child who was with the carnival—a very little baby who was always held tight in the arms of its mother did not count!—and the boys by the roadside would have been very glad to be in the place of Nadita; but even that did

not give her a glad feeling, for when she saw the boys she thought of Chico and Juan and Pedro, and she could feel the hard tear lump come into her throat and an ache place in her heart, and she wondered if ever she would see them again.

And now they had come to this strange town, and when they put up the tent place, Nadita was made to sweep with a broom made of long twigs, in the big circle in the middle of the tent, and the dark-faced woman gave her the little brown suit and told her that this day she would be truly a part of the show and people would clap their hands to see her. And a little—just a *very* little—Nadita forgot to be sorry and a feeling of excitement made her heart beat very fast. And if she had known what things were going to happen—SOON—her heart would have beaten very much faster—*TWO TIMES* FASTER than it was beating now!

Out in the big tent the people were crowded on the seats just as they had been that time she had gone with Pancho and the boys, and very plainly she could hear them laughing and shouting and calling things to the funny man with the white face. He did not seem very funny to Nadita now, for she had seen him when his face was not white, and he had frowned at

her and told her that there was no need to have another one to make the people laugh. And now the music was playing, and very soon she would run into that big place, just as the dark-faced woman had taught her how to do, and she would tumble head-over-heels in a somersault and then run up the rope and hang by her hands until the people laughed, but, as the time came nearer and nearer, Nadita grew so frightened and excited that she could not sit still, and something tried to make her say, "I cannot do it —I cannot be like a little monkey," and almost she wondered if this was only a dream thing. The woman would call her when it was time—and almost—almost it was time!

"Niña," came suddenly a voice in a sharp whisper, and Nadita jumped as if she had stepped on a live thing. That was not the voice of the dark-faced woman, and her eyes opened very wide but she could see nothing at all. "Hush!" came the whisper again. "Someone will come, and I do not want that they see me. I am on the outside, and I talk through a very small hole in the wall."

"Why do you do that?" asked Nadita in a voice that she tried to make very small. "Why do you call to me?"

"You are the little girl who had the brown dog—no?" asked the voice.

"Poco!" cried Nadita, forgetting to talk in a low voice. "I have Poco—he is a little brown dog."

"Hush!" said the woman again, for it was the voice of a woman, Nadita was sure of that. "Do not let them to hear. I have come to ask if you want to go back to the place where that little dog is."

"Oh—yes!" said Nadita, but the woman would not let her say more than that.

"Then, listen," she said quickly. "Listen very carefully—I will help you. I like very little that woman who makes you to climb—always she makes the ugly face at me and tries to spoil my act. Now we shall see who will be sorry. Listen—when you run into the circle place when the woman calls you—run very fast and then pretend that you stumble and fall down and have a hurt. And then stay still on the ground and I will run and pick you up. The woman cannot come, for she has an act, and I will help you that you get back to your home place. Do you understand that, now?—are you very sure that you understand?"

Nadita did not have time to answer, for before she could open her mouth, a sharp voice cried to her, and

it was the dark-faced woman who came quickly into the little room.

"Mona," she said, "now is the time for you to go in." She was very greatly excited, and spoke hurriedly. "Do the way I have told you—quick, or I shall beat you. Look how I have here the little stick"; and she pushed Nadita to the place that was open into the big tent, and there was a great roaring sound of many voices and music, and a big blur of faces everywhere.

Nadita stumbled forward, and then she ran. She could not see anything very plainly, for a beam of sunshine came straight into her eyes over the top of the canvas wall. She remembered plainly the words of the voice that had spoken to her through the wall, but a great confusion was in her mind. Whom did the voice belong to? Not anyone had been kind to her, and why should they be kind now? Nadita did not know that it was not a kind feeling that had made the woman talk through the wall, it was only that she wanted to spoil the thing that the dark-faced woman had planned, and she did not think to help Nadita at all. But it is strange how plans do not always come the way we think they will, and *this* plan made very many things to happen!

Nadita ran forward blindly, with her hands held out before her, and it was not a pretend thing at all that she stumbled and fell over one of the boxes that stood in the circle place. She fell very hard, but she was so excited that she could not tell whether she had a hurt place or not. For just a little she forgot what the voice had said and was going to get up as quickly as she could, when she heard in her mind the words over again—"Stay still on the ground," that was what the voice had said, and so she sank down again, like a limp little rag, and lay very still. What would happen now—she wondered. Would the voice woman come or the dark-faced one, who would have only ugly words and a stick?

There were many voices that cried out, and many feet ran into the circle place, but, louder than all the others, Nadita heard a voice that she had heard before—not the voice that had come through the wall, and it was not the dark-faced woman and it was not of the show at all. High and shrill came that voice!

"The little one is hurt—look!—the little one is hurt!" and a great wonder came into the heart of Nadita. Where had she heard that voice before?

CHAPTER XV

THE RESCUE

I know the world is very wide,
And very big—but, oh—
A burro I would like to ride,
To see the land and all beside,
And go—and go—and GO!

IT WAS not an easy thing for Nadita to lie still in the sawdust of the show place and wait for what might happen. It was not easy at all—there was a tickly place on the end of her nose, and very much she wanted to turn her head and see who it was that had called out with a voice that she had heard somewhere before. But the woman who had spoken through the wall had said to lie still, and so she lay still and waited—and waited—and it seemed a very long time before anything happened at all—and then, when it did happen, it was not the thing that she had expected—and not the thing that she wanted.

There were many voices talking, and feet that came near to her, but the voice that had talked through

the wall was not there and it was the dark-faced woman who picked her up and put her on her feet and looked into her eyes with a dark blaze of anger that was like fire.

"Why did you fall like that?" she asked Nadita in a fierce, low voice. "See, how you have ruined the act—and for nothing—there is no hurt on you."

Nadita looked quickly around with eager eyes when she was up, but then her heart fell like a heavy little ball of lead—only the dark-faced one was near her, and the master of Chocolate, and they both looked at her with angry eyes. The big blur of faces of those who watched from the seats turned away when they saw that she was not hurt, and looked quickly to see the woman who walked on a long stretched wire—and forgot altogether that Nadita was there—and the woman who was to help had not come at all. The hot tears came into the eyes of Nadita and made a shiny blur of everything, and she did not notice very much when the dark-faced one pushed her roughly back into the little room with canvas walls where she had been before, and gave her a sudden angry shove when she was there that sent her hard against the canvas side of the room. The woman was breathing quickly.

"I would beat you now, if there was time," she said. "In a little I will be back, and we will see then if you will mind what I tell you. I will come back in a little while, and then I will beat you." And she shook an angry finger at Nadita and walked out of the room.

And now Nadita was alone again in the little room, but it was not like it had been before. There was no excitement now of waiting to go into the big place where the people were, and no voice that talked through the wall. Why had not the woman come? And why did things happen in this bad way? A hot, hard feeling came into the throat of Nadita, and she stood in the middle of the little room with her hands made into tight little fists. Pancho had said many times that always there is a right thing to do, and surely it would not be a right thing to wait in this place until the woman came back with a stick to beat her. It was not a right thing that she was here at all. But if she went away, where could she go? This was a town that was far away from any place she knew, and not even the direction of the road that led back to the big tree place did she know. Nadita could not think what she would do, but one thing she did know, and every minute she

knew it more and more surely, and that was that she could *not* stay in this place—she could *not* wait for that woman to come back!

"Right now I must go," she said under her breath, "right this very minute!" and she looked quickly around the little room, and almost she expected to hear a voice come through the wall and tell her how to go, but the voice did not come—only in the heart of Nadita a big excitement began to grow, and her very own voice spoke again: "That is the thing to do —that is the thing that Pancho would say—only—only——" And then she looked down at the edge of the canvas wall as it came to the ground. There were pegs there that fastened the canvas to the earth, but at one place, between two pegs, the canvas did not look to be stretched very tight. The only door of the little room led straight into the big show place so she could not go that way, but *this* way—— She dropped down on her knees and began to push the dirt away and to pull at the canvas—only a little bit it would come up, but it was enough for her to get her head through very close to the ground, and she worked and pushed until her shoulders were just squeezing under the canvas. The people were coming out of the big tent now—she could hear the noise of

the many feet and the shouting and laughing, and right close to her they were beginning to pass. Nadita twisted her head through a little farther and looked up. A very large woman was passing near to her—a *very* large woman! Nadita blinked her eyes, and it seemed to her then that her heart stopped beating for a little.

"Lolita!" she cried suddenly, in a voice of great excitement. "Lolita! I want to go to Pancho!" She knew now where she had heard that voice that had cried out—it was Lolita—Lolita who had been the "little maid" very long ago, when Pancho was young, and who had married a bandit and now lived at the sugar hacienda of the Padrón—very plainly Nadita could see her in her mind as she had cried out that time when the little baby ran between the sugar pots—Lolita, who knew Pancho and would remember Nadita—and would help her, surely. Oh, *now* the wrong things could not happen any more.

And just then—at that very minute—she heard that people came back into the little room, where part of her still was, and hands pulled her back from under the canvas wall with a suddenness that made her to gasp, and the dark-faced woman caught hold of her and gave her a hard, quick slap on the side of the

face that sent her in a little heap down into the dust of the floor.

"You would run away," said the woman, in a loud voice. "You would run away—now we shall see what a stick will make you to do."

"LOLITA!" screamed Nadita again, with all the strength of her little lungs, but the sound that she made was not very large, as her mouth was in the dust, but then—something happened!

With a sound like thunder and the pulling of ropes and the jerk of pegs from the ground, the whole side of the little room went up like a curtain, and in the open place that it made was a woman—so big that it gave to the eyes a queer feeling to see her. It was Lolita!

The dark-faced woman was standing by Nadita with a stick in her hand, and near her was the master of Chocolate, and the both of them looked at Lolita with their mouths hanging open in astonishment. And through the open place were many other faces looking—of those who came out of the show-place.

"What is it that happens here?" cried Lolita, and there was a flash in her eyes, and her voice sounded loud in that small place. "And who called to Lolita?" Nadita raised her head quickly from the dust.

"Lolita," she said again, and, just as she called, the dark-faced one caught hold of her arm, but before she could do more than that, Lolita reached over and gave to that dark-faced one a push that sent her down on her hands and knees and face over in a corner of the room, and her mouth was filled with sawdust, so that, for a while, she could not speak and say the ugly things that always she liked to say.

"Let the little one talk," said Lolita. "Where is Pancho, and why are you, little one, here?"

"They stole me," cried Nadita, with a broken sob. "Take me away, Lolita. They are bad people." The master of Chocolate stood up now close to Lolita, and his face was the color of a very purple grape. He was so angry that the words he spoke came with a spluttering sound from his throat.

"Get out of this place—you—FAT ONE!" he cried. "What do you do here? Get out of this place quickly, or I will throw you out!"

"Hi!" called a little boy excitedly, out in the crowd. "Look! There will be a fight!"

"It is a part of the show," called another, "and he called her 'Fat One.'"

"That is strange—that he should call her 'Fat One,'" shouted another, "when she is so little and

so thin." There was a great shout of laughter at this, and the face of Lolita grew very red. It was plain to see that now she was very angry—as angry as was the man—and she made a great grab for him with her hands—and she lifted him up and threw him like a big bundle of stuff right through the open place in the canvas wall and out into the crowd of people who jumped to this side and to that to get out of the way. And when he came down to the ground he rolled over and over until he fell into the bucketful of water that was there for Chocolate, and the bucket turned over and mixed with the dust, and there was such mud that the master of Chocolate was more brown than his bear, and very ugly to look at.

Lolita picked up Nadita, then, and held her in her arms, and walked quickly through the crowd toward the roadway. The master of Chocolate got up slowly, and pushed the mud from his face, and shook his fist at her, and another man of the show cried out to her. Lolita stopped then, and she pulled a big peg up out of the ground, and she held it like a club, and she shook it at the show people—all of them.

"Come on!" she cried. "I will fight you—I will fight every one of you. CHILD STEALERS! THIEVES! I will be glad if you will come."

But they did not come, and the people who had been in the tent got a very different look in their faces. This was a thing they had not known—they did not know that those of the traveling carnival stole children.

"Yes," shouted Lolita, "I will be glad if you will come—and I am a friend of the gendarmes of this town—I will tell them. I will tell them *now*—how you are stealers of children!" and the master of Chocolate and the others began to have looks of fear in their faces, for the people looked at them strangely. "If you do not tear down your tent places and go now—quickly—the gendarmes will come and will put you in prison. I think not again will you steal little children, black-hearted ones!"

And the show people were very quiet then, and began to take in the flags and picture things, and the people shouted at them to be quick or the gendarmes would come. And Lolita put down her stick and walked quietly with Nadita to a wagon that was waiting by the roadside. She was muttering to herself, and Nadita could see that she was still very angry, but when she looked at Nadita, the angry look went away from her eyes, and she nodded in a very friendly way.

"It will be all right, little one," she said in a kindly voice. "They will not ever again take you away—and you shall go back to Pancho—very quickly you shall go back."

"I am glad," said Nadita, and a voice in her heart began again to sing. Lolita put her up on a wooden seat in the wagon, and then, with much work and puffing of breath, she climbed up into the wagon and sat down herself. And as she did that, it seemed to Nadita that all the world turned upside-down, for the end of the seat on which she was sitting went straight up in the air, and she slid down swiftly and landed with a soft bump against the fat side of Lolita. But Lolita did not fall off, and she laughed with very good nature.

"It must be that those ones spoke true," she said, as she pushed Nadita back into place. "I think maybe it is true that I am a 'fat one,' but only *I* can say it." Nadita laughed a little at that, but the seat would not stay down on her side, and for all the time of that ride she felt very much as if she were sitting on the side of a mountain. But it did not keep her from feeling very happy now.

It was good to think that she would soon get back to Pancho and to the big tree place. And now she

began to look around her and to see that the sky was bright with sunshine, and that there were trees and flowers and bright-colored houses by the roadside, and children who smiled and wiggled the fingers at her in greeting.

"Is the big hacienda very far from here?" she asked Lolita.

"It is far, but we will get there pretty soon," said Lolita, and then she smiled. "Always I have wanted to see a carnival," she said. "It is a very foolish thing that I came this time, for my husband could not come —it is a day when he must work with the sugar; and I left the little one—you have seen that little one—I left him with a woman who is a friend. And I have come all this way by myself—and look!" she said suddenly. "Look why I have come!"

Nadita looked up at her in surprise.

"You came to see that carnival-show," she said gravely. Lolita laughed, and then a puzzled look came into her face.

"No," she said. "It was to get you that I came. I did not know that, but now I can see that it is true. And when you look at me like that I think of someone—" she stopped and a puzzled frown was on her

face—"very *much* you make me to think of someone, but—I cannot think who that one is."

They were driving quickly now along the roadway behind the mules of the wagon of Lolita, and Nadita had wrapped a blanket Lolita had given her about herself to cover the little brown suit that maybe would make the children to laugh if they saw it.

In a little, she began to grow hungry, and Lolita looked how the sun was straight in the middle of the sky, and she drove the mules to one side of the road and lifted Nadita down, and then she got from the wagon a jar of black frijole beans cooked with chili peppers, and a little pile of tortillas, and they ate them on the grass by the side of the road, and Nadita smacked her lips when she was through.

"That is the way Pancho cooks the beans," she said. "The show people cannot cook like that." And then Lolita pointed down a steep bank that was on the other side of the road.

"There is water down there," she said, "but have a care that you do not fall in, if you go to take a drink." Nadita laughed at that, and gave a little skip and started down the bank.

"Do not have a fear of that," she called back.

This was a thing that she liked very much to do, and the water looked like the little stream that went past the big tree place of Pancho. She left the blanket up at the wagon, and did not think of the little brown suit with the long tail to it that she still wore. It was a very nice scramble down the bank, and there were flowers growing there, just like the flowers in the home place, and little birds singing in the trees, and the puffy clouds in the sky looked like the very same ones she had seen before. And those dark days with the show people went altogether away from the mind of Nadita, and the little dance feeling came back to her feet again, and she gave a little skipping step down the bank, and almost she expected to see Chico there, throwing stones in the water; but he was not there, and the water looked cool and clean as she kneeled down over it to drink.

"Ow—o—ow!" came a dreadful shriek! And Nadita almost fell over into the water at the sound of it. What terrible thing could have happened! "Santa Maria!" came a voice, and the loud noise of scrambling feet.

"It is a devil!" cried another voice—they were both the voices of women. "Always I have thought he would come!"

"No, it is a great cat!" cried the first voice, and Nadita got up in a great hurry to see what it could be. Two old women were scrambling up the bank as if something very terrible was after them. They scattered clean, dry clothes to this side and to that in the bushes as they ran, and cried to each other loudly in frightened voices.

"I tell you it was the devil," cried the first one. "The long tail was there, and the horns—Santa Maria, but I hope he does not follow us."

They had been washing clothes a little way down the stream, that was very plain, and something very terrible must have frightened them. A little fear thought came into the heart of Nadita, though she could see nothing at all, and she, too, began to climb up the bank to get back to Lolita. One of the women looked back just then, and the cry she gave was something terrible to hear.

"He comes!" she cried. "He is after us! Oh, that I had been more kind to my dear husband and to my little ones!"

Lolita heard, then, the very great noise, and ran quickly to the edge of the bank to see what it was that happened. The two women did not give one look at her, but ran into the road with a swiftness that

made it seem that the years had not taken the youth from their legs.

"Come back!" called Lolita then, for with one look she had seen what had happened. "There is nothing here to fear"; and when she looked at the big-eyed little Nadita who came scrambling up the bank, and whose little brown suit had caused all of this thing, such a laugh came into her voice that it was hard to make it loud. "Come back," she called again, "and see how there is no devil here." Nadita looked at her then, and it came to her what it was that had happened, and a little she was ashamed that the women had thought that she was a devil.

The two women still ran down the road—one was very fat and the other was thin, and they did not run so fast now—there was very little breath left in them. Lolita called again, for she saw that the clothes that they had washed would be torn and lost in the bushes; but she had to call many times and very loudly before the women would hear, and then, for a little, they would not come back. "See how it is a little child," called Lolita then, "only a little child in a funny dress"; and when they saw Nadita standing there and that she did no harm, they came back very slowly, and not altogether were their looks pleasant.

"But why do you dress her like that?" asked the fat one, and she spoke a little sharply, for her thoughts were on the clean clothes that would have to be washed again.

"I do not dress her like that," said Lolita, with a laugh. "She is from a show, and they made her to look like a little monkey."

"From a show?" said the thin one then, in wonder. "And what is a show?" Lolita threw up her hands. How could she explain a thing like that?

"It is to make people to laugh," she said. "She jumps around in a place, and then the people laugh."

That fat woman gave a little sniff.

"To me it is not a funny thing," she said, and she began to pick up the clothes that were lying about. "But"—and she gave a sound that was like a cackle—"it was funny to see *her*"—and she pointed to the thin woman—"to see her go up that bank—*that* was funny," and she began to shake all over with laughter, and in a little she sat down on the grass and laughed until the tears came into her eyes. The eyes of the thin woman began to twinkle then.

"If you could have seen the thing that *I* saw," she cried, "if you could have seen *that*—you might laugh," and she, too, sat down on the grass, and the

sound the two made as they laughed together was very much like a big place full of chickens. And then Lolita put Nadita in the wagon, and they drove away, and all the way down the road, and for a very great distance, they could hear the cackle of the two women laughing, and it made a funny giggle feeling to come in the inside of Nadita and she laughed, too—for a long tme.

CHAPTER XVI

A TALE OF BANDITS

Deep in the wood, in the dark of night
The whiskered bandits hide—
And creep through the leaves with footsteps light
To wait for the ones who ride!
They've an eagle eye for a jeweled ring,
Or the glint of a bag of gold—
And evil the night that does not bring
A prize to the bandit bold!

IN THE evening, when the sun was very little above the going-down place, Lolita and Nadita came to the sugar hacienda, and almost it was like coming home to Nadita. She saw again the great piles of sugar cane, and the men who worked with it, and the next day she went into the room where were the boiling pots and the lumps of sugar like little hats.

For a whole day and two nights Nadita stayed at the sugar hacienda, and Lolita gave her a little dress in place of the brown monkey suit; and she ate so much of the sugar cane that she felt she would not want any more for a long time, and she hugged the little baby burros so often and so tight about the

neck that she was afraid maybe she would wear all their soft, fuzzy hair away from them. Lolita saw her, one time, when she had her arms around a little burro, and a look came into her eyes that, for a while, Nadita could not understand. She thought for a little, and then she called to Nadita, and she led her around to a little patio place, where a very small burro with the biggest eyes and softest coat Nadita had ever seen was eating on a piece of sugar cane.

"Give him this," said Lolita, and gave to Nadita a small lump of sugar. The baby burro took the sugar very carefully in his mouth and looked up at Nadita with a soft-eyed look that said many things to her.

"Would you like to have him?" asked Lolita.

"O—oh!" said Nadita, and put her arms about the furry, warm neck. Lolita looked at her and smiled.

"To-morrow," she said, "a train of burros loaded with sugar will go from here back to the town of the Padrón, to sell the sugar. For a long time I have wanted to go, too—to buy things—and I will go to-morrow, and you will go—and if you will like to take him and can keep him in your home place, you can take Angelito, too—to keep—that is this little burro here." Nadita could not say one word—to have a

baby burro of her very own! She ran to Lolita and put her arms up to her waist, but they would not go round as they did with the little burro, but Lolita understood and squeezed her tight in her arms.

"That is good, then," she said; "and maybe Pancho can make him to carry the jars to market."

"Oh, yes," cried Nadita, and she could talk very easily now, "and he could carry me out to the place to get clay—and Chico could ride on him, and Juan and Pedro. Oh!—to-morrow and the day after that are so very far away!"

But they came—those days—very quickly, as most things do; and not only the things that Nadita expected came with them, but other things, too—you shall see!

Very early the next morning, there was much hurry and bustle in the sugar hacienda, and a strapping of saddles to the backs of burros, and a packing of sugar and of the things that belonged to Lolita; and Nadita hurried about as did the others, and brushed the soft coat of Angelito, and put some sugar cane in a bundle to take to the boys, and then—they were ready!

It was a wonderful morning—not like any other morning that had ever been, and only one thing was

lacking to the perfect happiness of Nadita—and that one thing was Pancho! If only Pancho could be here—but, then, he was at the other end of this trip, and very soon she would see him.

The sugar was packed in big bundles on either side of the backs of the burros, and Lolita sat on a saddle of wood made soft with blankets. The very largest and strongest burro was given to her to ride, but when she got up on it, three men had to help her up, and Nadita thought that the burro would fall, but one of the men laughed at the look in her face, and he said in a low voice to her, so that Lolita could not hear:

"Do not have fear, little one—the good God has a care for little burros, and He has made them very strong in the legs"; and then he lifted Nadita up on another burro with a saddle on it just like the one of Lolita and it felt very comfortable, like a chair that rocks.

The baby of Lolita was not to come this day, for only four days would she be gone, and the baby would be more comfortable in his own home place. So there were only three men to drive the burros and Angelito —for very certainly Nadita counted him as one of the party—who were to come with them.

And now the golden sunshine was creeping down

from the hills. First it brought the beautiful snow mountains into a glory of white and gold and blue shadows, and then, below them, the hills that were purple and blue with soft veils of mist; and then the sloping fields of cane and maguey plants; and, nearer at hand, the tall eucalyptus trees and the little gardens by the roadside with the small adobe houses of those who smiled at them as they passed; and right under their feet, always, were the little dogs who barked and nipped at the heels of the burros and reminded Nadita always of Poco.

This was a very jolly thing—this jog-jog-jog down the dusty road, with air that was the breath of roses and jasmine and dew to breathe—and so much to see, and the happy thought of Pancho and Poco and the home place just ahead—and Lolita felt happy, too—and when they passed down the street of a little town, she pointed to some very big iron gates that led into a patio garden where birds were singing.

"That is where the Señor Moreno lives," she said. "There is a tale about him."

"Oh," cried Nadita, "a tale is a thing that I like"; and to the noise of the little feet of the burros, and the calls of the men who drove them, and the barking of dogs, Lolita told this tale:

"It was a very long time ago, near to the town of Talipo, that these things happened. At that time it was not safe for anyone to ride in the roads in this part of the country, for everywhere there were bandits, and they did very strange things. But the very worst bandit of all was one that was called Pedro el Rojo [pronounced Paydro el Roho]. He and his band were the ones who stole the silver candlesticks from the Cathedral of Talipo, and even the very altar rail itself they stole—and they laughed at the gendarmes who tried to catch them—and they laughed when the mayor of the town put up a sign that said he would pay one thousand pesos to the man who would catch him alive or dead—he and his men. And there was a geat fear of Pedro el Rojo that grew with the deeds that he did. When the Governor was to be married to the beautiful Señorita Gonzalez, Pedro el Rojo sent word that for long he had loved the Señorita himself, and that the Governor should not have her; and right into the Cathedral itself he rode, on a great black horse, and took the Señorita from under the nose of them all, and rode away with her to the forest; and then the mayor made the paper that he had written to read that *twenty-five thousand* pesos should go to the man who caught him! And all the young

men of the land spoke of the time when they would catch Pedro el Rojo, and of the grand things they would do with the money; but not anyone caught him, and bolder and bolder he grew."

"Pancho could have caught him," said Nadita with shining eyes. "Pancho is very brave, and he could have caught any bandit."

Lolita laughed then, and when she laughed she shook all over like a great bowl of dough that is raised to make bread.

"But Pancho tried to catch this one," she said, "and he did not get him. I know, because my husband was one of the bandits with Pedro el Rojo—it is from him that I have this tale. But it was not that Pancho was not brave that he did not catch him—there were too many men of the bandits, and they had many places to hide in the forests—but one man caught Pedro el Rojo and the men who were with him, and he was not a brave man like Pancho was brave. Listen and I will tell you how that was." And Nadita opened her eyes very wide and listened carefully, and jog-jog-jog went the little burros, with a loud "Whack" every once in a little while, that was the sound of the men slapping them with a stick to make them go faster.

"It was this way that Pedro el Rojo was taken," went on Lolita. "In the town of Talipo lived two brothers—and remember always that the bandits did not know of this. The two brothers were so alike to each other that their very own mother could not tell them apart. Tall and thin they were, and very white in the face, and in voice and eyes and hair and manner they were as alike as two hairs on your head. Only this thing was different in them—one brother was very brave and one was afraid of the shadow that followed him. And the brave brother was getting always into trouble and the timid one stayed safe at home, so that very few people knew about him at all; and the brave brother made money and was rich, and the timid one had nothing at all but the shirt on his back and an old mule to ride on that was white with age and weak in the knees. But the brave brother was not kind, and made enemies of all he knew, and he took money from the poor, so that, in very truth, he was as much of a bandit as was Pedro el Rojo himself. But the timid brother was kind to everyone, and the very dogs in the streets jumped up to lick his hands when he passed, and the little children smiled at him and waved the hand. So that on the

outside the two brothers were very alike, but inside they were as different as night is from day."

"I like this tale," said Nadita, "and I think, maybe, I know what will happen."

"Hush!" said Lolita, but she said it with a smile. "You will make me to forget what I was going to say." Jog-jog-jog went the little burros, and Nadita sighed from very happiness.

"Well, this is the thing that happened," said Lolita. "One night, when it was very dark, the rich brother rode through the woods that were near to the town, and he thought of the money that was in a bag that he carried, and altogether he had forgotten Pedro el Rojo or any bandit that ever lived, and he had proud thoughts only of the rich coat that he wore, and of the great black horse that he rode, and of the silver spurs and saddle that made a jingling sound as he went jogging along. Yes"—and the eyes of Lolita sparkled—"I think that already you have guessed the thing that happened then—Pedro el Rojo and his bandits rode out of the wood from where they had been waiting behind the trees, and very easily they took the rich brother prisoner, and bound him tight with ropes, and took him from his

fine black horse; and his coat and silver spurs and saddle, Pedro el Rojo took for himself, and the bag of gold he gave to his men. And they carried the rich brother, bound hand and foot, to a cave deep in the forest, and they let him down into a hole in the floor of the cave and shut a door over him and covered the place, so that no one could find him. 'We will hold him for ransom,' they said, and that means that people would have to pay money to get him back again. But nobody wanted him back! In all that place there was only one who loved him at all, and that was the brother who looked to be like him—the one who was timid and poor and kind—but you shall see how it is not always the strong ones or the brave ones who win."

"I know that is a true thing," cried Nadita. "Pancho has told me that."

Lolita nodded. "Yes, that is a true thing, and it happens many times—and *this* time it happened! When the rich brother did not come back again, the poor one thought it very strange—and then Pedro el Rojo sent word that they would keep him until many thousands of pesos were given into the hands of the bandits. The people shrugged the shoulders, and the mayor said that he did not know where they would

find that great amount of money, and not anything was done by anyone but by the timid brother. At first he could not think of anything to do, and then he dug a little hole in his garden and brought up the small amount of money he had saved, and it was very little indeed—the bandits would have laughed to see it—but he bought with it a little black leather bag. 'I will stuff this with paper,' he thought, 'and perhaps that Pedro el Rojo will think that I have brought the money, and he will let my brother to go.' And he rode into the forest that very night on his mule that was white with age and that walked like a ship in a strong gale of wind. He was so filled with fear that he trembled like a leaf and the very teeth in his head made a chattering noise like castanets that are heard at a great distance; but for love of his brother he rode forward into the dim light under the trees, and he cried, in a voice that trembled much, for Pedro el Rojo to come out! Now, for very long Pedro had kept that rich brother under the cave, and he was angry that no money was sent, and he and his men had ridden out into the forest this night to rob whoever might come along; but this was a thing they had not bargained for—this thing that came riding in a long white shirt—this gibbering thing on a

shaky white steed; and when he came near they saw the face! There was no doubt about it at all! It was the face of the man they had kept prisoner under the cave—only gaunt and thin with the pallor of death! And Pedro el Rojo and all his men fell a-shaking with fright, and Pedro cried out in a voice that was hollow and thin, "What do you want of me?" he cried, and then he and his men turned like a flash, and out of the wood they flew, leaving the timid one with an open mouth and a feeling of astonishment in his heart. Now he could go about bravely to look for his brother, for the forest was free to all. In a little he came to the cave of the bandits, and there was no one to guard, for the man left there had heard the cries of the others and had run while there was time. It did not take a great while to find the place where his brother was hidden, for, when he called in the cave, a voice—very weak—answered him from below. But before he opened up the place under the cave the timid one filled all his pockets and the loose of his shirt with jewels and gold that he found in the cave."

"But why did the bandits run, in the forest?" asked Nadita, with round eyes of wonder.

"Ah!" said Lolita, "it was because they thought they saw the ghost of the man in the cave that they

ran—you remember I told you that the brothers were more alike than hairs in your head—and that is the way it happened—my husband told me that. And when the timid one had brought his brother back to town, he found that it was such an easy thing to be brave that never after that was he timid again, and he got together some men, and very easily he caught Pedro el Rojo and all his men, and put them in the prison place, and he got the reward of many thousands of pesos offered by the mayor and that is why he now lives in a great house with gates of iron. And the other brother grew so fearful, after that time when he was made prisoner by the bandits, that never again was he brave, and he was called the timid one as his brother had been before."

"And what happened after that to Pedro el Rojo?" asked Nadita. "Is he in the prison place until this very time?"

"Pouff!" said Lolita. "The prison was not made that could hold a man like that; but after a while he found that there was more excitement in a town than in the woods, and it has been said—I, myself, do not know if it is true—but it has been said that the man who is now Mayor of Talipo is the same who was once called Pedro el Rojo. But, look! what are those

wagons that go down the road with many flags flying?"

The heart of Nadita gave a jump as she looked, and almost she fell from the saddle of the little burro in a surprise that was full of terror. But quickly she saw that the wagons were on a road that went away from the one on which they were traveling, and when she saw that, her heart did not jump any more.

"It is the carnival show," she said. "Oh, Lolita, how I am glad that they did not see me, and that they do not go the road that we go."

And every little while, for all that day and for all the next day, she would say again how that she was glad. After that there were other things to think about, for she could tell by many signs that she saw by the side of the road that they were coming near to the home place; and even the little burro looked then as if he danced, because Nadita could not keep still on his back.

CHAPTER XVII

THE WONDERFUL NECKLACE OF FINA

The winding road and the setting sun
Both find their home when the day is done;
And so, when the west grows pale and gray,
We come to the end of the story day—
And find the rest in the land of dreams,
Where the silvery moon in splendor gleams!

THE road from the hacienda went past the big tree place before it came to the town and from a long way off Nadita could see that Pancho was there working on a pottery jar, and she grew so excited she could not wait.

"Pancho!" she cried, and there were tears in her voice, so that she could not make it very loud—"Pancho!" and he heard her and looked up with a very strange look in his face, and then he stood very still and waited for her to come near. But Poco did not wait! He heard the very first sound of the voice of Nadita, and he ran out into the road and jumped and barked so that all the little burros lifted up their ears and looked at him with frightened eyes, and

Angelito nipped at him very gently, but Nadita jumped down from her place on the burro and took Poco in her arms and squeezed him until he yelped.

And after that Pancho said that never in all his life had he been so happy. For days he had thought never to see Nadita again, and now the world was a very different place; and then the boys came—every day they had come to ask if Nadita were there—and they, too, were very happy that she was back, and they were glad to see Angelito, too, and the sugar cane, and to hear the very strange things that had happened to Nadita while she was away.

And Nadita walked around under the big tree, just to see if it was the same as it had always been; and she looked in the room of Pancho, where the jars were hanging, and in her own little room, and felt so happy that she wanted to dance on her tiptoes and sing. And many times she had to tell to Pancho all over again the things that had happened since she went away, and she squeezed him about the neck until almost he choked.

"But it is like a story thing," he cried more than once. "It is like a tale, all the things that have happened to you—and now you are a great traveler and have seen much of the world."

"Yes," said Nadita, "I have seen so much that I know that this is the very best place in all of it, and right here I will stay—always."

Pancho sighed when she said that.

"You will grow bigger than this place," he said a little sadly.

"Like Lolita?" cried Nadita. "Oh, no, I think I will not grow so big as this tree place," and she laughed as she said it.

Lolita had gone on with the burros into the town to buy things, but she had promised to stop again before she went back to the big hacienda.

"I will go and see my garden now," said Nadita, on the day after she had come home. "Now there are no thief men there and I will see if the swans are safe —the swans and my two dolls—for a very *long* time I have not seen them."

Pancho nodded. "And I will go and see the Padrón. He asked that I would tell him when you came back; he was very sorry to have you gone."

And so, in a little, Nadita found herself going in the old familiar way, up over the wall of the garden, and she felt very queer when she heard again the soft song of the wind in the trees and remembered all the things that had happened to her since last she had

been in this place. It seemed very beautiful in the garden, and the flowers had never looked so bright with color or smelled so sweet; and the swans floated on the still water and looked down at their clear reflection just as they had always done. It gave to Nadita a strange feeling—as if she had dreamed that she had been away, and that all the time she had been right here watching the swans. But she was glad when she looked at the little door in the rose garden to remember that it was locked, and that she could not go into that dark passage even if she had wanted to. She found Lucita and Fina, her two dolls, in the tumble-down summerhouse where she had hidden them, and it seemed very good to hug them tight again to her heart; and she took them to the edge of the swan pool and taught them how to throw little pieces of bread that she had brought, to the swans.

She did not know how long she had been playing with the dolls by the swan pool when she heard again the sound that she had heard so many times now in that garden—someone was coming down the path—right to the place where she was. Two men who talked in low voices as they came.

Nadita ran so quickly to hide that one of the dolls fell out of her arms, and she could not stop to pick

her up. It was Fina who fell, and when Nadita was hidden behind a bush she could see very plainly where the doll lay in the pathway with her face to the sky. Fina was made only of rags, and anyone but Nadita could not have known on which side was her face, but Nadita loved her very dearly, and to her Fina was beautiful.

The men had not seen her run to hide, but, as they came near to the swan place, one of them saw, with a little word of surprise, the doll lying there in the path, and, as he stooped to pick her up, almost Nadita gave a little cry, for she saw that the man who stooped was the Padrón, and never before had she seen him walking in the garden; and the man with him was Pancho. It seemed very strange to see them there, and together. As the Padrón stood up with the doll in his hands, Nadita heard the small tinkle of a little thing that fell, and again the Padrón reached down and picked up something from the pathway; and then, there was something that brought a look of wonder to the eyes of Nadita—it was the look in the face of the Padrón as he gazed at the small thing he had picked up from the pathway.

"What is it?" asked Pancho, for he, too, had seen that look in the face of the Padrón. "What do you see?"

The Padrón held a little thing in his hand, and there was a queer sound to his voice as he answered.

"It fell from the doll," he said. "Look—Pancho! It fell from the doll"; and Pancho looked, but it was clear that he did not understand; and then the Padrón did something to the little thing that he had in his hand, and then he turned very white—Nadita could see that—and he put his other hand over his eyes. Pancho caught hold of his arm as if he thought the Padrón was going to fall, and when he looked at the little thing again, he, too, had a strange look in his eyes.

"It—it is the boy," he said. "Very well I remember him, Señor."

The Padrón passed his hand over his eyes again and nodded.

"Yes, it is the boy," he said. "But the other one—I have not seen that one before, Pancho. And it fell from the doll—who plays with dolls in this place?"

"Ah!" said Pancho in a very different voice, and he looked about him suddenly, "it is Nadita who plays with dolls in this place, and when we have found her, very quickly she will tell us where this little thing has come from."

"Nadita?" said the Padrón, as if never he had heard the name before.

"Nadita!" called Pancho then. "Come!"

"I am here," answered a very small voice from the bushes close at hand, and Nadita walked out with her head held very low and the red burning hotly in her cheeks. The Padrón looked at her, but he did not smile as always he smiled, and in his eyes there was a look almost of pain.

"Does this belong to you?" he asked in a very husky voice, and he held out in his hand for her to see the little thing that he had picked up from the pathway. And it was a thing that she knew very well —a little gold locket to wear on a chain about the neck. She had put it on Fina with a string, and now it was open and showed on the inside a very tiny picture of a young man and of a girl.

"Yes, that belongs to me," said Nadita, and looked up into the eyes of the Padrón—very deep were those eyes, and now they did not look to be old.

"Where did you get it?" he asked, and Nadita could feel that now Pancho was looking at her as if she were someone strange.

"I did not get it," she answered bravely. "Always it has been mine. I think once it had a chain around my neck—Tia said that—but the chain is not there now."

"Tia!" said the Padrón, and it was as if this was

something that he could catch hold of. "Tia—said that. And who—who is Tia?"

"It is the woman she lived with," answered Pancho, "the woman who had Nadita before she came to me."

"We will go to her," said the Padrón. "Come—we will go to her, *now*."

And Pancho took Nadita by the hand, and they walked out of the garden—all the three of them together—to the house of Tia.

It was a very different Tia who let them into her little room—she looked to be different from the way she had looked when Nadita lived there. She was very clean of dress, and there was a smile on her face and a pink in her cheeks. She was greatly surprised to see them come to her house, and opened her eyes very wide, but she gave a little hug to Nadita, and brushed with her dress the dust from the one chair in the room, and gave it to the Padrón to sit on, but he would not sit down, and Nadita thought she could see that he trembled a little as he spoke. In his hand he still held the little gold locket, and he showed it to Tia.

"Can you tell me where this came from?" he asked in a steady voice. "Have you seen it before?" Tia opened her eyes a little wider than before.

"Yes," she said quickly. "That is the one that was on the neck of Nadita. There was a little gold chain, but it broke."

The Padrón frowned a little as if he did not know what to say then for a moment.

"Who *is* this little girl?" he asked then, very slowly, and he looked deep into the eyes of Nadita, and he seemed to try to read what was there.

Tia grew a little excited then, and spoke quickly.

"Always I have wanted to know that very thing myself," she said. "I will tell you how she came to me, and then, maybe, you can find the other part. It was six years ago that she came. My husband, Ramon, worked then for the railroad, down by Talipo, and we lived in a little house close to the tracks. There was a bad wreck of the train—late one night—and many people were killed; and then my husband brought this little one to me. She was crying and hungry, and there was no one to care for her. He said we would feed her, and then the ones who belonged to her would come, but they did not come. After a while, we did not wait for them any more, we thought that surely they had been killed in that wreck. And never have we heard more than that."

The Padrón was looking at her with an expression that Nadita could not understand.

"But, was there nothing," he asked quickly, when she stopped, "nothing at all on the child that would tell what was her name or where she was from?"

"There was the little gold locket," said Tia—"yes, and a little silk bag with a book in it."

"Quick!" said the Padrón. "Show me the book!"

Tia searched in a basket that was in one corner of the room, and then she brought out a small black book and put it into the eager hand of the Padrón. It was a Bible, and he opened it in a great hurry, and now Nadita could see plainly that his hands were trembling. He turned to the first page of the book where the name is written and when he saw that, he opened with shaking fingers into the middle of the book.

"Look! Pancho"—he cried—"look at this!" Pancho looked, but he shook his head with a queer little smile on his face.

"I do not read, Señor," he said.

The Padrón closed the book then slowly, and he sat down in the chair Tia had given him and pulled Nadita to him gently by the arm, and lifted up her chin with his hand.

"Look at me, little one," he said gently. "The good God has given you back to me. You are my own little—Little Nothing." And he put his arm tight around her and pressed his cheek down to her hair. "It is true, Pancho," he said then, in a voice that was almost a whisper. "I did not tell you that my son was bringing to me his wife to be a daughter, those long years ago. I did not tell you or anyone, because I was very angry that he had married one who was poor and was not of the families of Spain. But he wrote that, if I could see her, and the little one, that I would forgive—and that he would bring them to me—and then——! There came the news of the wreck of the train, and I was told that all were killed. It was from that time that I walked no more in the garden." The Padrón stopped for a little and Nadita felt a tear drop on her hand. "Never did I think," said the Padrón then, "never did I think that, in all that time, there was this—this—little one—waiting—at my very door—for the love that was all hers." The Padrón stopped then, and Nadita could not understand at all the things that were happening. Tia and Pancho looked at her strangely.

And then the Padrón looked up.

"It is here in the Book," he said, "the record of

my son's marriage and the birth of the little girl—but—" and his eyes had a new shine in them—"the name here is *not* Nadita. Listen to this, little one, what your name really is": And he read slowly and impressively from the Book—"Maria Theresa Rosita Montaña de la Espada—that is your name!"

"It was that I knew no name for her at all—that I called her Nadita," said Tia quickly.

"Yes," said the Padrón, and he smiled. "And I think always we will call her that."

And after a little—when the Padrón had shown her the beautiful big house and the room that was to be hers—Nadita began to know that this thing was true—that the Padrón was not a great man who would only smile at her as he passed, but was her very own grandfather.

For a while, it was hard to believe and was a thing she did not like to think very much. But when she saw that now she could play always in the beautiful garden, and could bring Chico and Juan and Pedro there, and could have a horse to ride, and could give to Tia all the things that she needed—then it began to be different. But the thing that made it nicest of all was about Pancho! Not *ever* was Pancho to be far away. The Padrón said that Pancho was more of

The Padrón.

a father and a grandfather to Nadita than anyone else ever had been or ever could be; and Pancho was to have a house of his own—a fine house built of stones, by the swan pool in the big garden, and if he wanted to make jars, he could make them there or under the big tree that always had been his own—and that always *would* belong to him—the Padrón said that. And *always* he was to do the thing that he wanted to do, and he was to stay near to Nadita. If it had not been for that, Nadita would have been very unhappy, but the Padrón loved Pancho almost as much as she did, and was very glad to have him live near.

And the Padrón was very kind to everyone now—more kind than ever before; he was like a man who has come again into the time of being young; and he told to Nadita tales that made her eyes to shine like stars.

"I will see that stone ship that you told me about," she said to Chico, "and all the places where you will go. Now, it is like I am a man, for I will travel, too—like men do. My grandfather tells me how I will go everywhere in all the world."

"And I will go, too," said Chico. "Very soon I will make money, and then I will go. And maybe there are

places I can go where you cannot go—big animal places, and where there is war—but I will tell you about them if I go."

"Hi!" said Pancho, when Nadita told to him all the plans she had made—"Did I not say that you would grow to be bigger than this tree place?"

Nadita looked thoughtful for a moment, and then she nodded slowly and smiled up at him.

"I think, maybe," she said, "it is not *only* the skin part of me that grows—the thought part of me now is as big—almost—as the sky is big. Is that the thing that you would say, Pancho?"

"Yes," said Pancho, and he put his hand gently on the black of her hair. "Yes, that is what I would say."